SERMON AS SHARED STORY WITH PARABOLIC INSIGHT

A Professional Project

Presented to the Faculty of the

School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Leslie R. Peterson

May 1984

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ABSTRACT

This professional project explores the use of storytelling in preaching. The exploration seeks, in particular, insights into the nature and communicative effectiveness of story as seen from the parables of Jesus. Insights derived from the exploration are given practical application in sermons.

The project begins with a study of storytelling and moves quickly into a longer study of the parables. The parables are considered from the vantage point of a historical survey of parable interpretation. Two parables are given closer scrutiny as to their form, content and interpretation. This is followed by a survey of story and parable preaching. The project concludes with an appraisal of four sermons.

Library research and the reading of books and journals dealing with story, parables and story preaching provided an entry into the project. Classes in hermeneutics, the parables of Jesus and new preaching forms complemented and added considerably to the scholarly discussion and practical application of the project aims.

It is concluded from this project exploration that storytelling is, indeed, one valuable communicative tool at the disposal of the modern preacher. The parables of Jesus, as story, can be preached true to their parabolic form and lend themselves well to narrative-like preaching.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has played a significant role in the history and development of civilization. Earliest written languages contain stories. Oral and written stories have served humanity for centuries as a means of conveying truth, culture, faith, identity and reality. In reflecting upon the Judeo-Christian tradition, Sam Keen states, "The whole of history is a story for which God provided the script."[1]

Storytelling has proven, in former times, a most effective tool for communication. Western civilization, however, especially in the 20th century, has made rather limited use of this tool, preferring more scientific modes of communication. Sam Keen, writing in 1970, charged that Western civilization had abandoned story for the modern experience of "the happening."[2] Many people of this generation, it seems, have turned their backs on their continuity with the past and dreams for the future and live in the present moment only. Communication has taken the path of encounter groups, communication labs and eye to eye contact, indicating to some extent the "nowness" of human experiences.

A resurgence in the use of storytelling has been experienced in recent years across several disciplines of study, including homiletics. The use of story holds real promise as an effective homiletical tool. Story communicates well because it has the ability to capture

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[1] Sam Keen, To A Dancing God (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) 90, 91.

[2] Ibid., 86.

and hold attention. It also reaches the emotional level as it draws listeners into situations being depicted. And, as with the parables of Jesus, story calls forth the participation of listeners in applying the message to life.

This project addresses the problem of the use of storytelling in preaching. I became interested in this project out of a desire to strengthen my own preaching. Remembering that congregations have responded well to stories I have told in sermons and knowing a little about the communicative power of story in my own life, I concluded that story sermons were well worth investigating. The investigation has proven interesting and helpful to me. It is my hope that the project will prove beneficial to others who seek help in communicating the gospel through preaching.

It is my thesis in this project that the communicative power to be found in story and storytelling, as experienced particularly in the parables of Jesus, is directly transferable to preaching through the story form.

The project begins with a discussion of story as a tool for communication. Historical, theoretical and practical aspects of storytelling are considered along with the role of story in Jewish and Christian traditions. This is followed by a historical survey of parable hermeneutics wherein the major contributions of parable scholars are examined and compared. Two parables of Jesus are then considered and interpreted in light of various hermeneutical methods. Next follows a survey of story preaching. After a discussion of the purpose and communicative values of preaching in general, there is

specific discussion on story preaching theory and techniques. A brief chapter on preaching parables in the light of parable and story theory is followed by an assessment of four narrativelike sermons based on the parables.

The project is entitled "Sermon as Shared Story with Parabolic Insight." I believe that several stories are normally blended or shared together in the preaching event. The primary story in preaching is, of course, The Story of God. This story encompasses God's action past and present: working with the people of Israel, fulfilling redemptive purpose in the life of Jesus, influencing the formation, nurture and development of the Church across a span of 2,000 years, and continuing active with those willing to blend their personal stories with God.

The preacher and each individual within a congregation have their own personal stories to share. Each personal story is unique, yet with experiences common to many. The blending of life stories and experiences, in the context of a sermon, provides new insights, commonality, identity, inspiration and mutual enjoyment.

The story of the Church, both universal and local, becomes part of a shared story celebrated in sermon. Christian people, worshiping, witnessing and serving together, form the context for a congregate story.

"Parabolic Insight," used in the title and sought in the project, refers to insights received from stories told by Jesus - stories called "parables." "All this Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed he said nothing to them without a parable" (Matt. 13:34). Walter Wink captures the genius of the parables of Jesus in the following statement:

Parables are tiny bits of coal squeezed into diamonds, condensed
metaphors that catch the ray of something ultimate and glint it at
our lives . . . . They are the jeweled portals of another world;
we cannot see through them like windows, but lights are refracted
through their surfaces that would otherwise blind us - or pass
unseen.[3]

The parables of Jesus will be defined in greater detail, along with the

major terms "story" and "preaching" in chapters dealing with the respec-

tive subjects.

Since Joachim Jeremias published his book, The Parables of

Jesus, in 1947, there has been a resurgence of interest in the parables

and a number of books written in the field. Among recent books con-

sulted in the project are: The Parables, by Dan Otto Via, Jr.; Language

Hermeneutic, and Word of God, by Robert Funk; In Parables: The Challenge

of the Historical Jesus, by John Dominic Crossan; Speaking in Parables:

A Study in Metaphor and Theology, by Sallie McFague; Jesus and the

Language of the Kingdom, by Norman Perrin; Perspectives on the Parables:

An Approach to Multiple Interpretations, by Mary Ann Tolbert; and Jesus'

Parables and the War of Myths, by Amos Wilder.

Major works dealing with the value and use of story in preaching,

consulted in this project, include the following: As One Without Author-

ity and Overhearing the Gospel, by Fred B. Craddock; Telling the Story,

by Richard A. Jensen; The Homiletical Plot, by Eugene L. Lowry; and

Preaching the Story, by Edmund Steimle, Morris Niedenthal and Charles

Rice.

Four recent Doctor of Ministry projects at the School of

Theology at Claremont have dealt with the use of story in teaching and

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[3]Walter Wink, Transforming Bible Study (Nashville: Abingdon
Press, 1980) 159.

in preaching. In 1977 John Bontrager wrote on "The Story as a Ministry to Children and Adults;" in 1978 Mary Ellen Kilsby wrote on "The New Hermeneutic and the Sermon as an Art Form;" in 1978 James Hartley wrote on "The Story as an Educational Form for the Church;" and in 1980 Mark Willard Luera-Whitmore wrote on "The Role of Story/Storytelling in Christian Spiritual Formation." While all of these projects deal with story in the life of the Church, none deal in detail with story preaching. In 1981 David Upp, studying at Southern Methodist University, wrote a Doctor of Ministry project on "Story as a Medium of Preaching." Upp does take a detailed look at story in preaching but does not deal in detail with the parables of Jesus.

My gratitude is expressed to all who encouraged and supported me in this project. Classes taken at the School of Theology at Claremont which especially complemented the project were: "Ventures in New Preaching Forms," taught by K. Morgan Edwards; "Hermeneutics," taught by James M. Robinson; and a directed study course, "The Parables of Jesus," taught by Burton L. Mack. I am especially grateful to my project advisors, Rod Parrott, in the area of New Testament, and Cornish Rogers, in the area of preaching, who offered advice in the formulation of the project and then read and offered criticisms of the work.

CHAPTER 1

STORY AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION

A Brief Historical Survey

The value of story as an effective tool for communication has been known for many centuries. Humans have always loved stories, using them to communicate knowledge, traditions, values and continuity with the past. The cave dwellers of the Cro-Magnon period, dating back to 25,000 B.C., drew pictures on the walls of their caves, revealing tribal history. It is believed a tribal storyteller pointed to these pictures while providing verbal narrative. "A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species Homo sapiens - second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter."[1] Every culture and generation, dating back to earliest man, has produced its stories and storytellers.

Jewish rabbis have a saying that "God made man because he loves stories."[2] If this is the case, as I believe it is, a story-loving God created story-loving children. It was by the word of God that human life was created and among the first words attributed to Adam are the words of a narrative, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."[3] The need within

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[1] Reynolds Price, _A Palpable God_ (New York: Atheneum Press, 1978) 3.

[2] Elie Wiesel, _The Gates of the Forest_ (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966) 1.

[3] Gen. 3:10 (RSV)

humans to tell their stories and dreams led them to produce speech and language. "The root of story sprang from need – need for companionship and consolation by a creature as vulnerable, four million years ago and now, as any protozoan in a warm brown swamp."[4]

In primitive societies the storyteller gathered people around to relate and interpret tribal stories, shaping the self-understanding and world view of those societies. Patricia Griggs tells of visiting an ancient village on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. A guide pointed out a house with a large front porch, saying it was the most important house of the village. The guide stated:

> To live in this house the man had to be over forty, widowed, and most important of all, he had to know the history and heritage of his people. It was to this house that all the children of the village came to sit and listen to the stories about their people.[5]

The storytellers of ancient China, India, Arabia and Japan were also highly respected and honored within their respective societies. The stories of Homer comprised the only literary content of education in ancient Greek civilization, and the stories of national heroes and statesmen, as in Plutarch's Lives, had great influence within ancient Roman civilization.

In medieval Europe there were skalds, jongleurs, and bards who were storytellers for their people. Their music, in ballad-epic form, told the stories of their land. The minstrels sang about the noble deeds of citizens, thus influencing the character of those who

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[4]Price, 13, 14.

[5]Patricia Griggs, Using Storytelling in Christian Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981) 7.

listened. In churches and cathedrals stories were told in art and stained glass, as well as in the often unfamiliar Latin tongue.[6] Christian content was often well mixed into the medieval stories.

Story form also took root in the literature and traditions of the New World. People migrating to America from many different nations of the Old World brought with them their stories and folklore. Some of these stories were preserved intact within tightly-knit ethnic settlements, while other stories took on the flavor of many nations.

> Versions of fables told by Southern Negro slaves have been dis-
> covered in Siam, India, Egypt, the Arab countries, and South
> America . . . . In brief, it could be said that, strictly
> interpreted, little of American folklore is indigenous, except
> that of the Amerindians which was present when the white man
> arrived.[7]

One distinctive story form which rooted and grew well on American soil was the "tall tale," defined as "an exuberant combination of fact with outrageous fiction."[8] American tall tales, telling about such indivi- duals as Rip Van Winkle, Paul Bunyan, Casey Jones and Davy Crockett, reveal much about the nature and ideals of the frontier American people. Among the well known tellers of tall tales were Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Carl Sandburg and Bennett Cerf. These storytellers used both the oral and written modes for sharing their stories. In twentieth

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[6] Joseph P. Russell, Sharing Our Biblical Story (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1979) 5.

[7] Jane B. Wilson, The Story Experience (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1979) viii.

[8] Ibid., x.

century America, with its rationalistic and scientific influences, storytelling has not been a highly valued method for transmitting ideas and ideals. Television and the movie theatre have primarily displaced one-to-one storytelling in the last fifty years. While the screen is a powerful medium for communicating story in a corporate manner, it cannot replace the power of the story where the teller and listener have personal interaction. Since television and movies provide both visual and spoken images they become passive media, stifling imagination. Radio stories, on the other hand, create images in the mind.

Within the past decade there has been an upsurge of interest in the art of storytelling. This renewed interest is found, especially, in the fields of literature, history, psychology and religion. The church-related disciplines of theology, Christian education and preaching are all striving to recapture the power of story.

Story, then, is an ancient and distinctively human method for communication. "The human being alone among the creatures on the earth is a storytelling animal: sees the present rising out of a past, heading into a future; perceives reality in narrative form."[9]

A Survey of Story Theory

But, what is story?

Story is defined as "the telling of a happening or connected series of happenings, whether true or fictitious; account; narration."[10]

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[9]Michael Novak, "'Story' and Experience," in James B. Wiggins (ed.) Religion As Story (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 175.

[10]David B. Guralnik, "Story," in Webster's New World Dictionary (New York: World, 1972) 1405.

Story is a literary form to be distinguished from argument, description or exposition. A story cannot be reduced to an argument, wherein its conclusions are summarized; it does not seek definiteness of expression through detailed descriptions; and it does not attempt to make clear with explanations. To the contrary, story focuses upon events and action, embodying movement and interrelationships. Etymologically the word "story" means "seeing" and refers to something made visible in the telling. Story, then, is an imaginative way of ordering human experience, a re-creation or mimicry of life itself.[11]

In the technical literary sense, a narrative is a sub-category of story. A narrative is prose which recounts happenings in a connected way. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, literary theorists, define narrative as "all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller."[12] A narrative can be present within, yet distinguished from, a myth, epic, legend, fable, short story, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, pantomine, painting, stained glass window, novel, local news or conversation. In the context of this paper the terms "story" and "narrative" will often be used synonymously in reference to tales that are told through literary works and which come to expression in both written and oral form. The term "storytelling" will refer to stories and narratives told.

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[11]David Upp, "Story as a Medium of Preaching" (Unpublished D. Min. project paper, Southern Methodist University, 1981) 1-12.

[12]Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University, 1966) 44.

A good story, whether written or given orally, has a definite structure which provides narrative movement. It has a beginning or introduction which introduces the characters, hints at the action and presents the question, conflict, or problem to be solved. The beginning of a story is often quite brief and leaves the reader or listeners eager for the action. The second part of a story is the body or plot. Aristotle saw the plot of a story as its soul.[13] Without the plot a story cannot exist. The plot develops the characters and conflict, around which the action revolves, leading up to the climax. The climax is the third part of a story. This is the focal point where the characters act, answering the question or resolving the conflict, revealing the moral or truth of the story. The conclusion is the final part of a good story, tying up the loose ends and relieving tension. The conclusion can often be stated in a single sentence, such as, "They lived happily ever after," or "God saw that it was good."[14]

The use of images and the appeal to exercise imagination are at the heart of every good story. "Stories are an imaginative way of ordering our experience; they express our sense of reality."[15] Images, whether dealing with God, man, woman, child, death, home, friend, enemy, or even ourselves, help visualize reality. Images bring new worlds of

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[13]Aristotle, The Poetics (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965) 27.

[14]Faye De Beck Flynt, "How to Tell Bible Stories," Church School 12:1 (September 1979) 7.

[15]John Navone, Towards a Theology of Story (Slough, Eng.: St. Paul, 1977) 44.

experience into being and transpose existence into these worlds. Images within stories challenge individuals to use imaginations and place themselves in new situations and new worlds. When imaginations are freed to work, individuals are transported to worlds inhabited by heroes or princesses or witches, or to the world of a people of God who struggled to fulfill their calling and see God's leading in their history. "Nothing comes nearer to defining persons than their images of God, of the world, of others. We define ourselves by the way our primal faith experiences and imagines the world and its particulars."[16] An active imagination, stimulated by a story, may help an individual define and re-define self, recapture a vital function of self that has become forgotten, open the door to new or lost relationships, grasp new insights into life, and change the direction life is proceeding. The genius and power of the story form lies in its ability to stimulate imagination, pointing beyond characters and plot to truths about life.

<u>Storytelling Techniques</u>

A story takes on special power and appeal when told orally and heard aurally. Oral-aural stories predate written stories by centuries of time and many written stories which have survived from ancient times were obviously transmitted in oral form long before they were written down. The formulaic composition of Homer's <u>Illiad</u> and <u>Odyssey</u> give evidence that these works were orally composed.[17] Many of the Old

[16]Ibid., 20.

[17]Scholes and Kellogg, 20.

and New Testament stories also bear evidence of descent from oral tradition. The movement and emotional power of the book of Revelation are best experienced when the book is read orally rather than silently.

To tell a story well is not an easy task. The few individuals who have mastered the task in each generation find themselves and their skills in continual demand. While not everyone can master storytelling, everyone can learn the basic skills and at least become acceptable storytellers. "Story can be learned; it requires the development of specific skills; it demands frequent practice. All of us tell stories from time to time, and can improve our timing, insight, exactitude, and cumulative power."[18]

Practice is a key to good storytelling. One must become thoroughly familiar with a story to the point that it becomes one's own story. The story need not be memorized. In fact, a memorized story may sound stilted and unnatural. Telling the story over and over aloud helps one become familiar with the sound of the story so that it becomes comfortable and natural to hear. It is helpful to tell the story into a tape recorder and then play it back, listening for pauses, pace, diction, accent and the kinds of emotion being communicated. Some of the words in a story may need rephrasing so they are comfortable for the storyteller to use. It may also be helpful for the storyteller to visualize the scenes described in the story and to visualize the audience to whom the story will be told. Finally, it is helpful to determine and practice the best facial expressions, body language and gestures to use for conveying the message of the story.[19]

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[18]Novak, 176.   [19]Griggs, 15-21.

Dramatic skills, such as pace, diction, accent, stance and gesture are valuable for the storyteller to learn. Pace is the speed at which one speaks. Storytelling lends itself to variety of pace, geared to the story content. Diction includes enunciation of words and pitch of voice. Diction within a story can vary considerably, depending upon the characters and dialogue. A change in pitch can change the meaning and force of various words within a story. The accent placed upon words for emphasis can become critical in drama and in storytelling. Emphasis placed upon words and syllables is a matter of volume level and intensity. Increasing or decreasing volume level brings feeling and strength to what is being said, causing listeners to sit back hard in their chairs or lean forward, straining to hear every word. Intensity is the tension or energy given to words and phrases, whether or not the volume or pitch are changed. Again, variety is important in the use of accent in storytelling. The non-verbal dramatic skills of stance and gesture are readily utilized in storytelling. Movement of body and hands can either distract from or add to what one is saying. The stance needs to be appropriate for the setting, whether this means sitting cross-legged on the floor, leaning on a table or standing erect behind a pulpit. Gestures can also be meaningfully used to express visually what is being said orally or simply to indicate a transitional movement in the progress of the story. The use of creativity and practice can help sharpen the story-teller's skills with stance and gestures.

A secret of good storytelling is for the teller to have mastered the skills of the art without making those skills obvious.

"The highest form of art is to disguise one's art."[20]   Oral-aural

stories, told with all the skill and natural ability at a storyteller's

disposal, come alive in the minds of the hearers. There is magic to be

known in good stories, told orally, that can weave spells over the

hearers and move them.

Communicating the Gospel through Story

Story, as has been noted, is a powerful tool for communication.

This truth is nowhere more obvious than in the Biblical record. The

Bible came out of a storytelling culture where truth was often wrapped

in the garment of story. The extreme popularity of the Bible among

all literature can be directly traced to the Biblical stories which

have captivated and held the interest of people for centuries.

The Jewish people have loved and told stories throughout their

long history. The Old Testament narratives provide ample evidence of

the Jewish love affair with story. The ultimate theme of the Old

Testament narratives is the mighty deeds of God with the actual subject

matter containing the lesser deeds of ordinary men and women. The

narratives reproduce human reality, with all the humor, struggles and

dreams of living, thus making the narratives interesting from one

generation to the next. The Old Testament writers used much skill in

blending myths, legends and epic or heroic poetry with fact-bound

history.

The relationship of the Jewish people to God has expressed

itself in two different forms of tradition - Halachah and Haggadah -

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[20]James B. Wiggins, "Further Thoughts," in Wiggins, 200.

which may be found in the Bible. Halachah is "the authoritative Jewish way of life as expressed in moral law and ritual precept."[21] Halachah encompasses the study and application of Jewish teachings, legislation and practices. Haggadah, which means "narration," refers to all scripture which is nonlegal. "The Haggadic method of instruction is by means of story, saga, legend, parable, homily, maxim, proverbs, and wise sayings."[22] Halachah and Haggadah have stood side by side in Jewish history, preserving the truth. Jewish storytellers today, such as Elie Wiesel or Harold Kushner,[23] continue to preserve and carry on the strong traditions of Haggadah.

Belden C. Lane suggests that Christians also have a tradition of Halachah and Haggadah. Christian Halachah consists of the left-brain classics of systematic theology whereas Christian Haggadah consists of the right-brain narrative traditions of the faith. Among those who have created and preserved a Christian Haggadah, according to Lane, are Jesus, the desert fathers of the third and fourth centuries, Anselm, Abelard, Peter Lombard, Aquinas, Martin Luther, St. Ignatius Loyola, John Bunyan, Soren Kierkegaard, G. K. Chesterton, Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and others.[24] G. K.

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[21]I. Epstein, "Halachah," in _Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible_ (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) 2:512.

[22]Ibid., 2:509.

[23]Elie Wiesel, who lived through the concentration camp of Auschwitz, has written numerous novels and tales from Hebrew scriptures. Harold Kushner, a rabbi, is author of the book, _When Bad Things Happen to Good People_.

[24]Belden C. Lane, "Story Telling: The Enchantment of Theology" (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1981) Cassette tape #3 and manuscript.

Chesterton recognized the value of the Christian story in appealing to the total psyche when he wrote that it meets "the mythological search for romance by being a story and the philosophical search for truth by being a true story . . . . And that is the reason why the myths and the philosophers were at war until Christ came."[25] I believe that Christians, like the Jews, have need to provide a balance between the rules and systems of faith and narrative - between Christian Halachah and Christian Haggadah.

The Christian story is centered in the person of Jesus, the Christ. Christians believe God and humankind met in the person of Jesus as a revelatory event. In the human image of Jesus, God was revealed as compassionate, self-giving love. The "good news" of Jesus' life and ministry, with special focus on his crucifixion and resurrection, was recorded for posterity by the four Evangelists.

Since the nineteen-fifties many American theologians, persuaded by the Bultmannian school in Germany, attempted to "demythologize" the stories of the Bible in order to help them to speak to the contemporary world. This has been a noble enterprise in exposing the existential meaning of the Biblical message. In the process, however, the story form was often discarded once the content of the message was determined.

In response to this loss, some theologians in the present decade are attempting to reinvest story with its former status and influence. Robert McAfee Brown elucidates this new trend, as he writes:

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[25]G. K. Chesterton, The Everlasting Man (New York: Image Books, 1955) 247, 246.

Our faith does not come to us initially as theology, and particularly not as 'systematic theology,' but as story. Tell me about God: "Well, once upon a time there was a garden . . ." Tell me about Jesus: "Once upon a time there was a boy in a little town in Palestine called Nazareth . . ." We have committed the unpardonable sin of transforming exciting stories into dull systems . . . . We must recover story if we are to recover a faith for our day.[26]

Content and form, especially when the form is story, stand together when one is seeking the full impact of the Biblical message.

J. R. R. Tolkien, who has been referred to as "the most eminent living teller of tales,"[27] uses the term "eucatastrophe" to describe a sudden turn in a story which brings about the consolation or joy of a happy ending. Tolkien sees eucatastrophe taking place in fairy-stories and in the Gospel accounts. He sees the Gospels containing the fairy-story which embraces the essence of all fairy-stories. "The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy."[28] John Navone, writing twelve years after Tolkien, elaborates on this concept of eucatastrophe in the Gospels, as follows:

The eucatastrophe of the Christ story is the ultimate possibility for the storytelling and story-listening animal that is man. The archetypal fairy-tale, the story that God tells in Christ, is the most beautiful, moving and significant experience open to man. God calls all men to make a 'willing suspension of disbelief' in order to enjoy the full impact of his storytelling.[29]

[26]Robert McAfee Brown, Creative Dislocation - The Movement of Grace (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980) 130, 131.

[27]Robert Roth, Story and Reality (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1973) 28.

[28]J. R. R. Tolkien, Tree and Leaf (Boston: Houghton Miffin, 1965) 72.

[29]Navone, 25.

The eucatastrophe contained in the events centering around the life of Jesus is a story too joyous and too good to keep quiet. Communicating the story to a wider and wider audience thus becomes the task of the Christian community. The story to be communicated can be viewed as the drama of God's acts within history with the central or climactic act occurring in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As the story is told, and accepted, it becomes related to the stories of the tellers and the hearers and begins to reinforce and redefine those stories. "Our theological task is to find ways to 'tell the old, old story' so that the listener says, 'Aha! That's my story too!'"[30]

It is now being widely accepted by Biblical scholars, Christian educators and homileticians that one of the best ways to communicate the Gospel is to stay true to the form and communicate by means of story. What does this mean? The Gospel, which permeates the Christian community and prolongs its existence, is told to people in a variety of story forms.

Perhaps the most effective story form is the story of faith lived out in an authentic manner through individual Christian lives and through the collective life of the Church. Christian individuals who exemplify and point toward the hero of their faith, Jesus Christ, by the lives they live, have the capacity to rehistoricize or personally relate the Christ story to their community and generation. Each individual experiences the truth of the Christ story in a little different way and thus has the responsibility of verbally relating their experience

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[30] Brown, 131.

as well. Each personal and communal telling of the Christ story con-
tributes to the total understanding of the Christian faith.

Within the worshiping Christian community the Christ story is
told through scripture readings, symbols of faith, statements of creeds,
sacraments, sermon and hymns. Burton Mack, in recognizing the pervasive
influence of the Christ story in Christian experience, writes as
follows:

> Most of what we celebrate together is determined by other ways of
> telling and hearing the story. We are those who are literally
> surrounded by the story in its several modes and enabled to be
> Christians by means of its narrativity. It would not be too much
> to say that Christians are those who know this story, hold it
> dear, fashion their worship along its lines, and hear it con-
> stantly in the background as they live their lives. Thus a
> Christian may be said to live 'out of' the story of the Christ,
> to see it in the pattern of the way to go, to be judged by it,
> and graced by it.[31]

Another very important way of communicating the Christ story
is through intentional educational endeavors such as Church schools,
Bible studies, workshops, conventions, Bible colleges and seminaries.
In essence, if an individual is actively involved in the total Christ-
ian community and enterprise, he or she cannot escape from hearing the
story of Christ and be challenged to share it with others.

In summary, story as a literary art form has a long and pro-
digious record in the flow of human history. The story form has
served admirably in preserving and communicating events, both small
and large, shaping human consciousness, identity and direction.
In the next chapter, I continue an exploration of the role of story

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[31]Burton Mack, "Seminar: The New Testament as Our Story,"
Impact 5 (1980) 30.

in Christian experience by examining one of Jesus' favorite story

forms - the parable. Often told - and retold by countless subsequent

Christians - these particular stories have been studied a great deal

in the last 50 years - and particularly intensely in the last 10 years.

I look at them for the promise they hold in revitalizing Christian

preaching.

CHAPTER 2

THE PARABLES OF JESUS AND HERMENEUTICS

<u>An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus</u>

The parables of Jesus comprise a significant portion of the teachings of Jesus and have, across the centuries, captured and held the attention of New Testament scholars and general readers alike. No other segment of New Testament studies has received more scrutiny in the past fifty years than the parables of Jesus. These parables appear to have timeless appeal and mystique, capturing the imagination of readers.

What is it about the parables of Jesus that attracts such intense interest? The answer lies in both the form and content of the parables. Parables are brief narratives which range in length from one sentence to several paragraphs, and range in complexity from childlike clarity to puzzling riddles. Some parables raise questions or clarify issues, while others have the power to ensnare listeners or readers. A parable narrative may proceed along a familiar path, drawing the listener into the story, and then suddenly turn and capture the listener under the judgment of the truth of the story. This turn in the parable offers new insight which forces a listener to rethink an issue or relationship. The parables of Jesus have the distinct ability to surprise listeners with the gift of grace. These parables deal with common and readily understood issues of life, giving them a ring of authenticity and believability. Jesus used parables to blend

the human with the divine. One moment he speaks of a shepherd search-
ing for a sheep and suddenly the listener visualizes God searching for
lost people. All these factors, coupled with the fact that the parables
are generally recognized as the most extensive legacy of the authentic
words of Jesus, make the appeal of the parables inescapable.

Basic to the interpretative or hermeneutical task, when con-
sidering parables, is an understanding of parables as a literary art
form. Scholars have not always seen eye to eye on the nature and
function of parables - a fact that has contributed to divergent parable
interpretations.

A traditional definition of parable is that it is an "earthly
story with a heavenly meaning."[1] This statement is true enough, as
far as it goes. However, it is important to be more precise. The
English word "parable" is a transliteration of the Greek parabolē,
which in turn is a translation of the Hebrew mashal. Mashal, which
is derived from the verb "be like" refers to "extended metaphors,
example stories, the visions of apocalyptic seers, or allegories."[2]
In addition, ancient Hebrews did not distinguish between a proverb and
a parable. In first-century koine Greek the term parabolē meant "an
illustration, a comparison, or an analogy, usually in story form, using
common events of everyday life to reveal a moral or spiritual truth."[3]

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[1]William Barclay, And Jesus Said (Philadelphia: Westminster
Press, 1970) 12.

[2]Bernard Scott, Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom (Philadel-
phia: Fortress Press, 1981) 23.

[3]Robert H. Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus
(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981) 15.

Dodd, by comparison, defines a parable as:

> a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting
> the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind
> in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into
> active thought.[4]

Such divergent understanding of the parabolic form, as seen in the

definitions of parabolē and mashal, has led to difficulties when

interpreting the parables of Jesus.

A parable is a distinct literary form used to convey meaning.

All literary meaning may be divided into two modes; the direct and

indirect or the literal and the tropical. A tropical meaning, or

"a trope," is "a turn or change which occurs when an unexpected word

is placed in a syntactic structure and is thereby given another meaning

in addition to its literal one."[5] Every parable is technically a

trope or tropical narrative, using figurative language and having two

levels of meaning. Scholars have distinguished several categories or

varieties of parables: metaphors, similitudes, parables in the strict

sense, allegories and exemplary stories.

"A metaphor is the substitution of the name of one thing for

the name of another, so that one or more properties of the first are

attributed to the second."[6] Two examples of New Testament metaphors

are "go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 10:6),

and "You brood of vipers!" (Mt. 12:34).

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[4]C. H. Dodd, _The Parables of the Kingdom_ (New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1961) 13, 14.

[5]Madeleine Boucher, _The Mysterious Parable_ (Washington:
Catholic Biblical Association, 1977) 18.

[6]Ibid.

A similitude narrates a typical event of life, making compar-
isons which may or may not be elaborated upon. An example of a
similitude is the parable of the mustard seed, as Jesus states, "With
what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable (similitude)
shall we use for it? It is like . . ." (Mk. 4:30-31).

Parables in the strict sense narrate a story without an intro-
ductory statement. "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger
of them said to his father . . ." (Lk. 15:11-12). "Listen! A sower
went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and
the birds came . . ." (Mk. 4:3-4).

An allegory "literally signifies that something different is
said than what is really intended."[7] It is a type of code language
which needs to be deciphered point by point. "In a parable things are
what they profess to be: loaves are loaves, stones are stones, lamps
are lamps. But in an allegory it is not so."[8] The interpretation
given following the parable of the seeds is allegorical. "He who sows
the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world, and the good
seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil
one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the
close of the age, and the reapers are angels" (Mt. 13:37b-39).

An exemplary story is a story with a moral, taken from real
life. It is generally seen as a strictly literal story which needs no

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[7]Jan Lambrecht, _Once More Astonished_ (New York: Crossroad. Press,
1981) 8.

[8]Archibald M. Hunter, _Interpreting the Parables_ (Philadel-
phia: Westminster Press, 1960) 10.

transfer from image to reality. The "parables" of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29-36), the rich fool (Lk. 12:16-20), and the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk. 18:10-14a) are often classified as exemplary stories.

It is obvious Jesus used parables and other figures of speech, with skill, in a wide variety of ways in his teaching ministry. He told stories that captured the imagination, unveiled mysteries, opened doors of understanding, and mediated the realities of human existence. More importantly, his stories move individuals toward action and decision. They have the power to compel individuals to see things as they are, and thus to come to truth and to respond.

Parable Hermeneutics

The parables of Jesus, by their very nature, call for interpretation and reinterpretation. It is not hard to understand the first or literal level of meaning in most parables, but the second or tropical meaning is not always immediately discernable and thus needs interpretation. The process of interpreting the parables of Jesus began very early in Christian history. In fact, it is widely recognized today that by the time the synoptic Gospels were written the parables had already undergone considerable interpretation.[9] The same parable has been interpreted differently by different Gospel writers. For example, the parable of the Lost Sheep is placed by Luke in a context (15:3-7) in which Jesus defends the gospel against his opponents; Matthew places it in the context (18:12-14) of a call to the leaders

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[9] Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972) 42, 43.

of the Christian community to exercise faithful pastorship. Parable interpretation did not end with the Gospel writers but continues to the present day. The science of interpretation, hermeneutics, is applicable and abundantly relevant for the parables of Jesus.

The modern era of parable interpretation began in 1888 with the publication of Adolf Jülicher's great work, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu. The next sections of this paper will be dedicated to a brief analysis of parable interpretation prior to Jülicher and a more exhaustive analysis of parable interpretation in the modern era. I am indebted, primarily, to two writers, Norman Perrin in his book, Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom, and Warren S. Kissinger in his book, The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography, for the general shape of this parable analysis.

Parable Interpretation prior to Jülicher

In the days following the resurrection of Jesus and birth of the church, the parables of Jesus were orally taught and preached. It was during this time, prior to the actual writing of the Gospels, that the parables began to be allegorized. Allegory remained the primary method of parable interpretation for the next 1800 years.

The early church fathers made extensive use of allegory in parable interpretation. They were likely influenced by the fact that four parables of Jesus were accompanied by allegorical interpretation in the Gospel accounts (Mk. 4:14-20; Matt. 13:37-43, 49-50; Jn. 10: 7-18). They believed the parables had hidden meaning which could only be disclosed with the help of allegory. Allegorical interpretation of texts had also been used by Philo and other Hellenistic writers as

an esteemed practice. The following parable interpretation from the writings of Clement of Alexandria (ca. A. D. 150 - ca. 215) is an example of allegorical usage by a church father:

> Good Samaritan = Neighbor = Christ; Thieves = Rulers of darkness; Wounds = Fears, lusts, wraths, pains, deceits, pleasures; Wine = Blood of David's vine; Oil = Compassion of the Father; Binding (of health = Love, faith, hope and of salvation).[10]

Other church fathers who used this allegorical method were Marcion (Rome), Tertullian (Carthage), Origen (Alexandria and Caesarea), Ambrose (Milan), and Augustine (Hippo). Chrysostom (Constantinople), Theodore (Mopsuestia), and the Antiochene School were among the few individuals and groups to raise a dissenting voice regarding the use of the allegorical method.

The Scholastics of the Middle Ages continued to follow the lead of church fathers in interpreting the parables allegorically. Martin Luther, in the days of the Reformation, taught that the scriptures were to be interpreted literally rather than allegorically. However, he continued to allegorize the parables to find within them the doctrine of justification by faith. John Calvin was more consistent in his rejection of the allegorical method of interpretation. He was the first to reject a Christological interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan, saying the purpose of the parable is "to show that neighbourliness which obliges us to do our duty by each other is not restricted to friends and relations, but open to the whole human

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[10]Clement of Alexandria, _The Rich Man's Salvation_ (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) 331, 332.

race."[11] Those who succeeded Luther and Calvin once more reverted to an allegorical interpretation of the parables. Thus the allegorical method prevailed until 1888.

Parable Interpretation from Jülicher Onwards

Adolf Jülicher   Adolf Jülicher, a German Protestant, published Volume I of his landmark work Die Gleichnisreden Jesu in 1888. Volume II followed a year later. In his writings, Jülicher discarded the allegorical method of parable interpretation. Joachim Jeremias writes, ". . . Jülicher not merely proved incontestably by hundreds of cases that allegorizing leads to error, but also maintained the fundamental position that it is utterly alien to the parables of Jesus."[12] He classified the parables of Jesus as similitudes, having only one point of comparison, rather than allegories. He stressed that the single point within each of the parables of Jesus was to illustrate general truths concerning morality and religion.

C. H. Dodd   In 1935 the English scholar, C. H. Dodd, published his book The Parables of the Kingdom. Dodd agreed with Jülicher in respect to allegorizing but did not agree that the parables of the kingdom are concerned with general truths of morality and religion. Dodd preferred to place the parables into the specific setting of Jesus' life. He wrote:

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[11] John Calvin, A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) III, 38-39.

[12] Jeremias, 18.

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We should expect the parables to bear upon the actual and critical situation in which Jesus and His hearers stood; and when we ask after their application, we must look first, not to the field of general principles, but to the particular setting in which they were delivered. The task of the interpreter of the parables is to find out, if he can, the setting of a parable in the situation contemplated by the Gospels, and hence the application which would suggest itself to one who stood in that situation.[13]

It was Dodd who first emphasized the value of interpreting the parables in their original Sitz im Leben. Dodd emphasized that a person could reconstruct the exact location in the life of Jesus when a particular parable was given. In this manner he helped disclose that the parables were, at times, used as "weapons of controversy by which Jesus sought to break down the prejudices and standards of his audience."[14] In the first part of his book Dodd argues that the nature of Jesus' message consisted of only a "realized" eschatology. In the second part of the book he sets the parables of Jesus in the context of realized eschatology.

Joachim Jeremias Joachim Jeremias, a German scholar, published an outstanding book on the parables of Jesus, Die Gleichnisse Jesu, in 1947. The book has since undergone six German editions and three English revisions, appearing in English as The Parables of Jesus. An abridged edition, Rediscovering the Parables, was published in 1966. Jeremias, like Dodd, agrees with Jülicher's view on allegorizing and with Dodd's attempts to explain the parables on the basis of the life situation of Jesus. Jeremias, however, disagrees with Dodd's views on eschatology, modifying "realized" eschatology to

[13]Dodd, 13, 14.   [14]Stein, 59

"eschatology in the process of realization."[15] In summarizing the

contributions Jeremias has made to parable interpretation, Norman

Perrin states:

> It is here (with textual criticism) that we find the first aspect
> of Jeremias's contribution to the discussion, for it is to Jeremias
> above all others that we owe our present ability to reconstruct
> the parables very much in the form in which Jesus told them . . . .
> A second aspect of Jeremias's contribution to the interpretation
> of the parables may be discussed under the rubric of historical
> criticism, and here we will see a characteristic strength and
> also a characteristic weakness of his work . . . . For Jeremias
> the whole purpose of the scholarly interpretation of the parables
> of Jesus is to allow the man of another time and place to hear
> the voice of Jesus as Jesus' contemporaries heard that voice . .
> . . The weakness stemming from Jeremias's concern for the voice
> of the historical Jesus is that ultimately he is not concerned
> with the parables as texts with an integrity of their own, need-
> ing to be interpreted in their own right.[16]

Jeremias combines a concern for discovering the life situation of the

parables with a detailed study of their Palestinian background in his

influential study.

Mary Ann Tolbert points out that while Dodd and Jeremias use

essentially the same historical-critical method, strive toward under-

standing the parables in the life situation of Jesus, and agree that

the parables should be interpreted in the light of Jesus' eschatology,

"their interpretations of the same parable diverge radically."[17] In

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[15]Jeremias, 230.

[16]Norman Perrin, Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 101, 103, 105.

[17]Mary Ann Tolbert, Perspectives on the Parables (Philadelphia:
Fortress Press, 1979) 25.

my opinion, the conviction emerges that parable interpretation can and does differ from individual to individual even when identical methods are applied to the parables.

"The New Hermeneutic" The next phase of modern parable interpretation took place through the impetus of the "new hermeneutic." In accepting Wilhelm Dilthey's understanding of hermeneutics as "the methodology for understanding the expressions of human life fixed in writing,"[18] Rudolf Bultmann argued such texts could be questioned or "interrogated by the interpreter with regard to their understanding of the nature of human existence in the world."[19] Ernst Fuchs, a pupil and successor of Bultmann at Marburg, along with Gerhard Ebeling, consciously went beyond Bultmann in their understanding of hermeneutics. A key phrase of this new hermeneutic became "language event," referred to by Fuchs as Spachereignis and Ebeling as Wortgeschehen. The fundamental difference between Bultmann's hermeneutics and the new hermeneutic is summarized by Norman Perrin as follows:

> Bultmann had tended to regard language as essentially a vehicle for transmitting an understanding of existence, as a means of conveying an 'expression of life.' Fuchs, on the other hand, is concerned with what in English came to be called the 'performative' aspect of language. He is concerned with language as 'language event,' with the power of language to bring into being something that was not there before the words were spoken. So Fuchs understands the parables of Jesus as a 'language event.' It is not that Jesus created new concepts, but rather that in the parables "Jesus' understanding of his situation 'enters language' in a special way." Jesus verbalizes his understanding of his own

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[18]Perrin, 10.

[19]Ibid., 11.

existence in the world in such a way that that understanding of existence is now available as a possibility for the hearers.[20]

While Ebeling grounds much of his work with "language event" in Martin

Luther, Fuchs grounds his work particularly in the parables of Jesus.

As language events he sees the parables bringing people into relation-

ship with God and calling them to decision. As an example of how the

parables become language events, Fuchs looks at the parables of the

Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl (Mt. 13:44 and 45ff).

> Through these parables Jesus has mediated a sense of certainty and of joy in God. But what is more, they reveal the secret of the rule of God, of the love that is grounded in Jesus' own experience. Thus these parables can become a language-event for those who perceive that God is their ultimate security and that He has acted to draw them to His side. Such an event truly places the existence of the recipient in a new perspective.[21]

A pupil of Fuchs, Eta Linnemann, also discusses the parables

as "language event" in her book, Jesus of the Parables. She says "a

successful parable is an event that decisively alters the situation."[22]

It has the power to compel decision and bring about new life. In

interpreting the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), she

writes:

> The story certainly leaves no doubt that what really matters is to act as the Samaritan did; and our conscience says a clear "yes" to this. But only in the same simplicity as he showed can we really act as he did, and let ourselves be governed completely by the need of the man who confronts us.[23]

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[20]Ibid., 110.

[21]Warren S. Kissinger, The Parables of Jesus (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1979) 185.

[22]Eta Linnemann, Jesus of the Parables (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 30.

[23]Ibid., 56.

A second pupil of Fuchs, Eberhard Jungel, interprets the parables of
Jesus in terms of language event. In one of his observations, Jungel
states: "A guiding principle for interpreting the parables is that
the Kingdom comes to speech in parable as parable, or the parables of
Jesus bring God's reign into language as parable."[24]

The new hermeneutic has made a significant contribution to
modern parable interpretation, I believe, in recognizing the power for
change found within parabolic language. Emphasis on language event
in parable interpretation focuses attention on historical criticism
and present application. James M. Robinson, writing in 1968, stressed
the contribution of the new hermeneutic in unlocking the historical,
material role of language in understanding the parables. He writes:

> The Christian message has to do with a particularly acute instance
> of the convergence of factuality and meaningfulness, in that, to
> use Bultmann's formulation, a historical occurrence is at the same
> time the eschatological event. This eschatological meaningfulness
> that comes with, indeed comes as, the language of the parables,
> there to happen in Jesus' factuality, is what was lost on the
> chronological debate about futuristic eschatology, realized
> eschatology, and eschatology realizing itself. The material role
> of the language itself in the actualizing of God's reign was
> overlooked. Hence it is in terms of this bit of unfinished
> business that the new hermeneutic's contribution to the study
> of the parables is to be seen.[25]

While the new hermeneutic scholars gave special attention to literary
form and language, they were not literary scholars. The real advance
in parable interpretation from the standpoint of literary criticism,
I believe, had to wait particularly for Amos Wilder and Robert Funk.

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[24]Kissinger, 194.

[25]James M. Robinson, "Jesus' Parables as God Happening," in
F. Thomas Trotter (ed.) Jesus and the Historian (Philadelphia: West-
minster Press, 1968) 143.

Amos Wilder   While discussions on Biblical interpretation during the 1950's and 1960's centered around the new hermeneutic, in the 1970's these discussions subsided. One who did continue a scholarly search for the meaning of Jesus' language, especially in regard to the parables, was Amos Wilder. Wilder's book on the parables is a collection of his essays dealing with the parables, Jesus' Parables and the War of Myths. It is evident from these essays that Wilder made use of all areas of Biblical scholarship in interpreting the parables. Warren Kissinger writes, "Wilder weaves the various strands - literary, existential, eschatological - into a pattern of interpretation that places him in the forefront of contemporary parabolic exposition."[26] In 1971 Wilder published a book, Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel, in which he introduced the area of literary criticism into the study of parables. James Breech, editor of Jesus' Parables and the War of Myths, classifies Wilder as a rhetorical critic in contrast to a reductionist critic. While a reductionist interpretation divorces language from content, a "rhetorical interpretation uses the results of historical and theological analysis, but then directs its attention to the way the language of a particular text dynamically evokes response, its Semantic."[27] Breech calls attention to the impact of Wilder's approach to parable interpretation in the following statement:

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[26]Kissinger, 152.

[27]Amos N. Wilder, Jesus' Parables and the War of Myths (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) 5.

> Wilder's rhetorical interpretation enabled him to see the parables
> functioning as metaphors that provide a revelatory shock of insight,
> as images that convey directly to the imagination a vision of what
> is revealed . . . . It would not be too much to assert that
> Wilder's insistence that the parables function as metaphors in the
> sense that they are revelatory initiated a revolution in the
> understanding of Jesus' language.[28]

Wilder views the parables as stories which not only convey meaning but
move individuals to action by evoking everyday experience. The para-
bles are down-to-earth and speak to individuals about their most acute
questions of existence. He writes:

> It is important to insist that the interpretation of a parable or
> a miracle story must go beyond ideational, theological, moral, or
> historical concerns, which are all reductionist. The import of
> the text is inseparably related to the "machinery" of its language.[29]

Wilder sees content and form standing together in parable interpretation.
With this approach he allows the parables to speak for themselves,
independent of interpreters, evoking their own meaning. He sees the
parables speaking in meaningful terms for each generation as they
continue to "tell from depth to depth"[30] about the longings, frus-
trations and hopes of people. In my estimation Wilder has provided
one of the most imaginative and prophetic voices in parable inter-
pretation.

> **Redaction Criticism** The development of redaction criticism
in the 1950's and the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas in Egypt,
published in 1959, had significant effect upon parable interpretation
in later decades. Redaction criticism concentrates on the way an

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[28]Ibid., 11.   [29]Ibid., 100.

[30]Ibid., 13.

author adapts or redacts earlier materials. In the study of the

Gospels redaction criticism takes into account three life situations

or three Sitze im Leben: the life of Jesus, the oral period and the

life of the evangelists or redactors.

> Redaction criticism is based on the recognition that the produc-
> tion of the gospels, and probably of their written sources as
> well, represents a third life setting, distinct from that of Jesus
> and the intermediate period of unwritten tradition, and that
> consequently the activity of the authors who produced these
> documents demands investigation. Both in their rewriting of
> earlier works and in their interpretation of the still fluid
> tradition they may display imagination and innovative freedom,
> while at the same time paying considerable respect to the
> material they start with.[31]

When there is a written source prior to a gospel, then the Gospel

represents a fourth life situation.

The Coptic Gospel of Thomas is quite different from the

synoptic Gospels. "It contains no narrative of any kind and consists

entirely of synoptic-type teaching material, i.e. sayings and

parables with very simple introductions."[32] The parables of Jesus

in the Gospel of Thomas appear in totally different order from those

in the synoptic traditions and are often textually different. Perrin

writes:

> Most parable interpreters came to hold the versions of the
> parables in Thomas to be independent of the versions in the
> canonical gospels and hence a valuable addition to our resources
> for reconstructing the original text of a given parable.[33]

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[31] R. T. Fortna, "Redaction Criticism, NT", in Interpreter's
Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976) Sup-
plementary Volume, 733.

[32] Norman Perrin, Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus (New
York: Harper & Row, 1976) 35.

[33] Perrin, Jesus, 132.

Redaction criticism and the Gospel of Thomas have provided
interpreters with two more tools for interpreting the parables - the
awareness of an editorial hand in the text and setting of a parable
and an independent parable source. While these tools provide new light
for understanding the parables, they also raise more questions and
complicate the interpreter's task. I see these tools as worth the
time and effort for an interpreter to use, however, as they help
increase confidence in the original wording and quality of a parable
text to be interpreted.

Robert Funk   Robert Funk, like Amos Wilder, brought new
insights to parable interpretation through literary criticism. In
1966 Robert Funk published a book, Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of
God, in which he wrote on the parable as metaphor. He began with
Dodd's definition of parable:

> At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from
> nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or
> strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its
> precise application to tease it into active thought.[34]

Next, Funk analyzed and elaborated upon Dodd's definition. He began
with the last part of the definition in emphasizing the importance of
regarding parables as open-ended as far as interpretive meaning is
concerned. He writes, "it is not possible to specify once and for all
what the parables mean. For to do so would mean that the parable,
once the application has been made and reduced to didactic language,

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[34]Dodd, 5.

is expendable."[35] Funk then makes a distinction between a metaphor and

a simile by saying, "To say A is <u>like</u> B is a simile. The less known is

clarified by the better known. To say A <u>is</u> B is a metaphor."[36] If one

says "The Kingdom is like . . . ," this is a simile; if one says, "The

Kingdom of God is . . . ," this is a metaphor. A simile is illustrative

whereas a metaphor has the potential for creating new meaning. Also

important to Funk is the nature of a parable to draw the hearer into it

as a participant, an event which occurs because the parable is both

open-ended and metaphorical in nature. Funk does make it clear that

not all parables operate as metaphors. He discusses the parables of

The Great Supper (Lk. 14:16-24) and The Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37)

with metaphorical understanding. In my opinion, Funk's literary

critical insights have further strengthened parable understanding and

interpretation.

> <u>Dan Otto Via</u>   Dan Otto Via, Jr., took the approach of literary

criticism for parables a major step further in his book, published in

1967, <u>The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension</u>. On the

literary level Via begins his book with the familiar distinction

between allegory, parable, similtude, and example story. He observes

that, in contrast to Jülicher's view, "the possession of only one

central point is not one of the essential differentiae of a parable."[37]

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[35]Robert W. Funk, <u>Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 135.

[36]Ibid., 136.

[37]Dan Otto Via, Jr., <u>The Parables</u> (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) 17.

While not returning to the earlier, allegorical, interpretation of parables, Via contends that parables can have allegorical elements within them without becoming allegories. While acknowledging the great contribution of Jeremias in understanding and emphasizing the historical setting for the parables, Via raises four areas of weakness in the strictly historical approach to the parables:

> (1) The first criticism is that in view of the non-biographical nature of the Gospels it will usually be difficult if not impossible to ascertain in exactly what concrete situation a parable was uttered. (2) The severely historical approach ignores the basic human element in the parables. (3) In the hands of some of its practitioners the historical approach threatens to leave the parables in the past with nothing to say to the present. (4) The severely historical approach ignores the aesthetic nature of the parables and annuls their aesthetic function.[38]

In regard to his last criticism, Via states that the goal of the interpretation of parables "is better served by recognizing their aesthetic nature than by first of all deriving their meaning from the historical context or by making them illustrations of ideas."[39] Via returns to the aesthetic nature of parables later in his book stating that appropriate parable interpretation "should not isolate one point but should call attention to the total configuration, to the nature of the interconnections, and to the understanding implicitly contained therein."[40]

On the existential level Via stands squarely in the tradition of the new hermeneutic and language event. He contends that the real-

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[38]Ibid., 21-24.   [39]Ibid., 24.

[40]Ibid., 93.

istic and dramatic nature of the parables ties them to human experience

and to understanding divine-human relationships. He writes:

> In Jesus' sayings and parables he brought together the presence of
> God and the context of daily living . . . . Jesus' parables were
> a language event in his day, and the purpose of interpreting them
> is that that event might occur once more in the exposition.[41]

The second major section of Via's book deals with a closer look

at individual parables, under the classification of tragic and comic

parables. Tolbert summarizes this section by saying, "Via takes as his

organizing factor the upward (comic) or downward (tragic) movement of

the plot and analyzes each narrative parable on the basis of these

and other accepted canons of literary criticism."[42] His remarks are

divided into "historical-literary criticism," "Literary-existential

analysis," and "existential-theological interpretation," with his main

focus on the second category.

Via's book contains a wealth of material on the parables and

is a major American contribution to parable research from the stand-

point of literary and existential criticism.

John Dominic Crossan   Another leading American interpreter of

the parables of Jesus is John Dominic Crossan. His major contribution

to this field is his book, In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical

Jesus. His other works dealing with the parables are The Dark Interval:

Towards A Theology of Story, Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence

in the Parables of Jesus, and his significant contributions in the

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[41]Ibid., 52.   [42]Tolbert, 28.

Journal Semeia. Crossan begins his book, In Parables (1973), by making

a distinction between allegory and parable, with the help of four

important poets: Goethe, Coleridge, Yeats, and Eliot. He indicates

that the distinction, made in the first half of the twentieth century,

between allegory, with its many points, and parable, with its single

point, is an inadequate distinction. In drawing the distinction Crossan

points out that figurative or tropical language serves two different

functions.

> One is to illustrate information so that information precedes par-
> ticipation. The other is to create participation so that
> participation precedes information. The former function produces
> allegories and examples, pedagogic devices which are intrinsically
> expendable. The latter produces metaphor on the verbal level and
> symbol on the nonverbal level . . . . Metaphor can appear as
> either parable or myth . . . . A parable tells a story which, on
> its surface level, is absolutely possible or even factual within
> the normalcy of life. A myth tells one which is neither of these
> on its surface level.[43]

Crossan, in other words, makes a clear distinction between the function

of allegories and example stories, on the one hand, and metaphors and

parables, on the other hand. Crossan sees the parables of Jesus

functioning, not as allegories, but as metaphors of normalcy which

create participation on the part of the readers and listeners.

Crossan brins to the parables an intimate knowledge of poetry.

Despite this heavy poetic emphasis, the subtitle of Crossan's bock,

The Challenge of the Historical Jesus, emphasizes his conscious attempt

to look at the parables as parables of Jesus in contrast to Via's con-

sideration of the parables as literary works of art. Crossan sees the

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[43]John Dominic Crossan, In Parables (New York: Harper & Row,
1973) 15.

parables as helping to create and establish the historical situation

surrounding Jesus.

> He was not crucified for parables but for ways of acting which
> resulted from the experience of God presented in the parables.
> In this regard the parables are cause and not effect of Jesus'
> other words and deeds. They are not what Joachim Jeremias called
> "weapons of warfare"; they are the cause of the war and the man-
> ifesto of its inception. In summary: as against Jülicher, the
> parables are not timeless moral truths beyond all and above all
> historical situations; but, as against Jeremias, neither are they
> to be located in Jesus' own historical experience as visual aids
> to defend a proclamation delivered before them and without them.
> Jesus' parables are radically constitutive of his own distinctive
> historicity and all else is located in them.[44]

Crossan identifies three "key parables" of Jesus "which show

most clearly the deep structure of the Kingdom's temporality and which

contain in themselves the entire parabolic melody."[45] The representa-

tive parables are called parables of advent, reversal and action.

Under these key parables, The Hid Treasure (Matt. 13:44), The Pearl of

Great Price (Matt. 13:45), and The Great Fish (Gos. Thom. 81:28-82:3),

Crossan lists three groups of parables. These parable groups are

summarized by Perrin, as follows:

> Parables of Advent (of new world and unforseen possibilities):
> The Fig Tree, The Leaven, The Sower, The Mustard Seed, The Lost
> Sheep, The Lost Coin; Parables of Reversal (of man's entire past):
> The Good Samaritan, The Rich Man and Lazarus, The Pharisee and
> the Publican, The Wedding Guest, The Proper Guests, The Great
> Supper, The Prodigal Son; Parables of Action (the expression of
> the new world and the new possibilities): The Wicked Husbandmen,
> The Doorkeeper, The Overseer, The Talents, The Throne Claimant,
> The Unmerciful Servant, The Servant's Reward, The Unjust Steward
> and The Workers in the Vineyard.[46]

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[44]Ibid., 32, 33.   [45]Ibid., 33.

[46]Perrin, Jesus, 160, 161.

In his book, _The Dark Interval_ (1975), Crossan again uses his poetic and theological skills in talking about the parables. He once more contrasts parable and myth (see above, p. 37) by first quoting Frank Kermode: "Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change," and then saying, "Parables are fictions, not myths; they are meant to change, not reassure us."[47] He also makes a perceptive statement, ". . . parable is story grown self-conscious and self-critical,"[48] indicating the depth of insight captured within parable. He continues to expand on the discussion of the nature of parables, when he writes:

> The parables of Jesus are <u>not</u> historical allegories telling us how God acts with mankind; neither are they moral-example-stories telling us how to act before God and towards one another. They are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world and thereby render clear and evident to us the relativity of story itself. They remove our defences and make us vulnerable to God.[49]

In examining the way the parables of Jesus function, Crossan thus makes the determination that these parables are poetic metaphors and stories which shatter accepted world concepts. Such metaphorical stories have the power to create participation in a new world that is the Kingdom of God. The new world opens for us, the listeners and readers, only after we have participated through the metaphor in the referential world.

Crossan's definition of parable becomes determinative for him as he interprets the parables of Jesus. His third book, _Cliffs of_

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[47] John Dominic Crossan, _The Dark Interval_ (Niles: Argus Communications, 1975) 56.

[48] Ibid., 57.

[49] Ibid., 121, 122.

Fall (1980), consists of three separate papers presented on different occasions between 1977 and 1979. The first chapter, "Paradox and Metaphor," is a response to essays written by Paul Ricoeur in _Semeia_ 4 in 1975. The second chapter, "Sower and Seed," focusing on the parable of The Sower, was originally presented at a University of Chicago conference in 1979. The third chapter, "Polyvalence and Play," was originally written for _Semeia_ 9 in 1977. Using his vast knowledge of literature, Crossan attempts a theory for understanding the polyvalent nature of parables, that is, why they can be interpreted in such a wide variety of ways in different times of history by different individuals with equally valid meanings. He writes that as a game cannot be won absolutely, without destroying the play and the player, so also one cannot interpret a parable absolutely without destroying the parable. "Since you cannot interpret absolutely, you can interpret forever."[50]

Crossan's work with the parables provides significant new insights for understanding and interpreting the parables of Jesus. He has become a major contributor in this field. I find him blending literary, textual and historical criticism of the parables in a way that broadens my understanding of the nature and function of parables. His technical knowledge of literature, most evident in _Cliffs of Fall_, did, however, make me struggle to perceive his meaning.

SBL Parables Seminar   Much of the work of Crossan, Via, Funk and Wilder was done in the context of the Parables Seminar of The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). The Parables Seminar was formed

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[50] John Dominic Crossan, _Cliffs of Fall_ (New York: Seabury Press, 1980) 102.

in 1972 when leading interpreters of the parables in America came
together to study and publish articles. The articles were published
in the experimental Journal over the next few years, beginning in 1974.
Seminar members worked the first year on "A Structuralist Approach to
the Parables," publishing their work in _Semeia_ 1. Via and Crossan
exchanged articles. Crossan contributed papers on "The Servant
Parables" and on "Parable and Example in the Teaching of Jesus." Via
responded with a paper on the parable of The Good Samaritan from a
structuralist interpretation, thereby signalling that his methodology
was no longer a "literary-existentialist" approach but a "literary-
structuralist" approach. In the introduction to the volume Amos Wilder
compares such structural investigation of texts to open-heart surgery.

> Going deep into the sacred text the procedure appears neutral and
> austere, not being concerned with meaning in the usual sense.
> But this attention to the laws and workings of language can alert
> us to the bearings and dynamics of a text otherwise overlooked.[51]

In his article, Via distinguishes between "story" and "discourse,"
with story being an objective statement creating events and characters
and discourse a subjective statement characterized by the present and
future tenses and evaluative statements. A discourse can also include
one or more stories. Within a particular story level he identifies
two other levels.

> Plot (sequential analysis), a tightly cohering organic unity of
> three episodes which open, maintain, and close the sequence, and
> actants (actantiel analysis), a group of not more than six
> functions, roles, or structures "whose quality is to be the sub-
> ject of or participant in a constant action." The actant is

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[51]Amos N. Wilder, "An Experimental Journal for Biblical
Criticism: An Introduction," _Semeia_ no 1 (1974) 11.

usually a personal character, but it need not necessarily be so. The analysis of a story in terms of actants is a fundamental aspect of a structuralist approach to narrative.[52]

Crossan basically disagrees with Via's structuralist approach and proposes a structural analysis of the "binary opposites present in the 'deep structures' of Jesus' 'parabolic narration,'"[53] reflecting his concern for polar reversal in the parables.

Semeia 2 (1974) continued dialogue on the parables, with focus concentrated on the parable of the Good Samaritan. Contributors for this issue included Crossan, Funk, Via, and Wilder. In addition, Daniel Patte has an article on the structuralist method and terminology and Georges Crespy has an article on structural research. Crossan offers a helpful article on the historical development of structural analysis as a method. Using structural terms he defines a parable as "a story whose artistic surface structure allows its deep structure to invade one's hearing in direct contradiction to the deep structure of one's expectation."[54] Funk deals with the parable of the Good Samaritan as a metaphor instead of example story, recreating the effect the parable may have had on the original hearers. "If the auditor," he writes, "understands what it means to be the victim in the ditch, in the story, he/she also understands what the kingdom is all about."[55] In commenting on Funk's article, Robert Tannehill states that the audience would

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[52]Perrin, Jesus, 171.   [53]Ibid., 174.

[54]John Dominic Crossan, "The Good Samaritan: Towards A Generic Definition of Parable," Semeia no. 2 (1974) 98.

[55]Robert W. Funk, "The Good Samaritan as Metaphor," Semeia no. 2 (1974) 79.

more likely identify with the Samaritan in the parable.[56] Whether the
audience identifies with the victim, as Jew, or the rescuer, as Samari-
tan, the story upsets the normal world expectations and creates audience
participation in the new world of the Kingdom.

Semeia 9 (1977), with articles by Tolbert, Via, Crossan, Bernard
Scott and Susan Wittig, focuses on the parable of The Prodigal Son.
Tolbert provides a psychoanalytical reading of this parable with the
following conclusion:

> We can see that at least one reason for the parable's prominence
> lies in its power to touch the heart of human desire. It depicts
> the continuing conflict and attempt at resolution that form the
> basic fabric of everyday psychic life. The wish fulfilled by the
> parable is the wish for harmony within, for unity no matter how
> partial nor how precarious.[57]

Via provides a psychological approach to the parable of The Prodigal
Son using Jungian terminology. He shows that the dynamics involved
in the parable are "the alienation of the ego from the Self and its
reintegration through coming to terms with the shadow."[58] Crossan's
article is the one contained in his book, Cliffs of Fall. Scott feels
that the traditional interpretation linking the elder son with the
Pharisees is an inadequate interpretation. The second part of his
article analyzes the narrative and mythical structures of the parable,

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[56]Robert C. Tannehill, "Critical Discussion," Semeia no. 2
(1974) 116.

[57]Mary Ann Tolbert, "The Prodigal Son," Semeia no. 9 (1977)
19.

[58]Dan O. Via, "The Prodigal Son: A Jungian Reading," Semeia no.
9 (1977) 21.

pointing out that the elder son is not rejected in the parable and

calling into question the mythical understanding of the relation between

elder and younger sons.[59]   Scott follows the narrative structure model

proposed by A. J. Greimas and the mythical structure model proposed by

Levi-Strauss in making his analysis. Wittig casts doubt on the ability

of structural analysis to reveal "heretofore hidden structural phenomena

responsible for the creation of meaning,"[60] while suggesting a pluri-

significant or polyvalent view of the parables.

Most of the Semeia articles deal with structural analysis of

the parables. The articles indicate that there are multiple structures

which have gone into the creation of parables. There are also structures

imposed by readers upon texts in the act of reading, as seen in the

psychoanalytical approach. There appears to be an ongoing debate among

scholars as to the value of structural analysis. Crossan, with his

literary background, is one scholar among others who favor this approach

to the parables. Perrin,[61] Kissinger[62] and Tolbert[63] are among scholars

who express doubts regarding the value of this method. While the final

verdict is still to be decided, I do not find structural analysis of

the parables an especially helpful tool for me as a preacher. When I

become more familiar with the technical language used in this field I

may find structural analysis more helpful.

[59]Bernard B. Scott, "The Prodigal Son: A Structuralist Interpretation," Semeia no. 9 (1977) 45.

[60]Susan Wittig, "A Theory of Multiple Meanings," Semeia no. 9 (1977) 76.

[61]Perrin, Jesus, 180.   [62]Kissinger, 229.

[63]Tolbert, Perspectives, 30.

Sallie McFague   In her book, <u>Speaking in Parables: A Study in</u>
<u>Metaphor and Theology</u>, Sallie McFague expands upon the thoughts of
Dodd, Wilder, Perrin, Via, Funk and Crossan in accenting the meta-
phorical qualities of the parables.   She sees New Testament language,
and in fact all language, as having foundation in metaphor.   She refers
to the parables of Jesus as "extended metaphors."

> A parable is not an allegory, where the meaning is extrinsic to
> the story, nor is it an example story where, as in the story of
> the Good Samaritan, the total meaning is within the story.   Rather,
> as an extended metaphor, the meaning is found only <u>within</u> the
> story itself although it is not exhausted <u>by</u> that story.[64]

In keeping with the thinking of the new hermeneutic, she contends that
"we do not interpret the parable, but the parable interprets us . . . .
Metaphors cannot be 'interpreted' - a metaphor does not have a message,
it is a message."[65]   She also believes that metaphors, as found in the
parables, are at the heart of theological reflection, helping people to
hear God's word, disrupting their ordinary world, and moving them to
new thought and new life.

Bernard Scott   Bernard Scott, noted earlier in the discussion
on structural analysis, also places heavy emphasis on the parables as
metaphors which defy interpretation.   In his book, <u>Jesus, Symbol-Maker</u>
<u>for the Kingdom</u>, he writes:

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[64]Sallie McFague, <u>Speaking in Parables</u>   (Philadelphia: Fortress
Press, 1975) 13.

[65]Ibid., 71.

Parable as metaphor demands the parable never be done away with. A parable's interpretation is always secondary and in no way necessary for parable. Insofar as an interpretation stands authoritatively in front, it closes off a parable's opening, violating what it is supposed to interpret . . . . The true task (of the interpreter) is to provide an opportunity for meaning's disclosure by creating the necessary conditions for hearing. We cannot state what a parable means, for it has no meaning separate from itself. We can only circumscribe the terms necessary for hearing.[66]

Parables as metaphors are open-ended, paving the way to multiple meaning and multiple individual interpretations.

Mary Ann Tolbert   Aware of the polyvalent nature of parable interpretation, Mary Ann Tolbert published a book entitled, Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations. After making a brief survey of the history of parable interpretation she concludes: "any individual parable is capable of having a variety of equally valid interpretations, depending upon the characteristic interests of the interpreter."[67] Tolbert agrees with McFague and Scott that a parable carries its own interpretation, but cautions against identifying "one's reading of a parable" as the meaning of the parable.

It is a serious deception to believe or assert that one's reading of a parable is only what the parable itself says and not an interpretation of it. Such deceptions can lead to a rigidity and dogmatism that fundamentally violate the open-ended nature of the parable form, a nature which the descriptive term "metaphorical" was originally intended to convey.[68]

It has been argued by the church leaders and scholars up until recent times that reading and interpreting the parables within their gospel

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[66]Scott, Jesus, 15.   [67]Tolbert, Perspectives, 31.

[68]Ibid., 42.

context prevents multiple interpretations. Tolbert, however, suggests
that divorcing the parables from their gospel context, especially where
that context violates the parable story, can "assist in the hermeneuti-
cal task of trying to understand what the parables can mean for the
Christian community today in all its multiplicity."[69] While recog-
nizing the value of historical research and reconstruction of the
gospel context for the parables, Tolbert thinks this leaves the task
of interpreting parables for the contemporary situation only partially
fulfilled. As a result, she suggests exploring the polyvalency of the
parable form as a means of helping the ancient texts interact with
contemporary concerns.

Tolbert devotes a chapter of her book to the development of
guidelines for interpreting the parables. She believes, first of all,
that parable interpretation is an art rather than a learned skill or
technology. While using the techniques of literary and historical
criticism, the interpreter brings to the interpretation his or her own
insights, understandings and values so that the final result of
parable interpretation is a creative act. Tolbert also believes that
the parable story is the controlling element in the process of inter-
pretation. "The first major axiom of this study is that preservation
of the integrity of the parable story should be the guiding principle
of all interpretations."[70] A second axiom of parable interpretation
is that "in a literary work form and content, though distinguishable,
are inseparable."[71] This means that the literary-critical task of

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[69]Ibid., 62.   [70]Ibid., 71   [71]Ibid.

discerning form and structure must be inseparably tied to the content of the parable and the particular insights of an interpreter. Tolbert then delves into specific literary-critical tools helpful in exploring the parables, such as analyzing the surface structures of the parables, clustering the parables together to aid understanding, and examining the blend of symbolism and realism in the parables. She concludes that "it is possible to exploit the polyvalency of the parable form while yet restricting it by taking as the first principle of interpretation the preservation of the integrity of the story itself."[72]

Summary The parables of Jesus have, without doubt, come under the close scrutiny of the modern hermeneut. Jülicher's demonstration that the parables are not allegories, but contain a single point, launched the modern era of parable research. Dodd stressed that the parables should be seen in the context of the coming of the kingdom of God. He also placed the parables in the context of a "realized" eschatology and in the original *Sitz im Leben* of Jesus. Jeremias emphasized that the parables, located in their cultural-historical context, really speak of eschatology in the process of realization. He also brought a greater degree of scholarly sophistication to the textual and historical analysis of the parables. The new hermeneuts, such as Fuchs, Linnemann, and Jungel, began to look at the parables as "language events," containing the power to create new life. Wilder, while recognizing the historical, existential, eschatological and language event character of the parables, in a sense pioneered an emphasis on

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[72]Ibid., 93, 94.

the literary, semantic qualities of the parables. Funk shared in this emphasis of literary-criticism with his particular focus on the metaphorical nature of the parables. Via's attempts to bring parable interpretation into greater focus and balance, by viewing them not only as historical objects but as literary-aesthetic objects, added considerably to parable understanding. Crossan's interpretation of the parables as poetic metaphors, while using textual, historical and literary criticism, added an exciting chapter to the hermeneutical process of parable study. The developments of redaction-criticism and structuralist analysis continue to broaden the base of parable interpretation. The continued research into the metaphoric and polyvalent nature of the parables by numerous scholars attest to the fact that the parables remain a source of fascination among scholars and will likely be scrutinized, due to their powerful appeal, for many years to come.

Postscript

This brief, and not all-inclusive, survey of the course of parable interpretation in recent times can leave one standing in awe before the parables of Jesus. While the parables contain simple language and apply to everyday matters, they have unique and far-reaching influence on the minds and actions of people in every generation. The first listeners were often puzzled by the parables of Jesus, and contemporary listeners are still puzzled by their intriguing form and content. Parables have been analyzed to their bare bones, yet stand fully enfleshed and powerful as Word of God.

The steady research and change in the field of parable inter-

pretation, while hammered out primarily by academic scholars, has had much influence upon local churches and ministers. Teaching and preaching within churches have changed along with scholarly research, however at a much slower pace. When I began my ministry twenty-six years ago there was still a strong tendancy within churches to interpret parables allegorically. This was nearly eighty years after Jülicher wrote Die Gleichnisreden Jesu. Throughout my ministry I have taught and preached on the parables with the understanding that they have only one point of comparison. Most of my contemporaries in ministry, as far as I know, have stressed that Jesus conveyed a single aspect of truth in each of his parables. In recent years I have heard about developments in modern parable research and this study on parables has helped to bring me up to date. Another generation will likely pass before the full impact of current parable study is felt in local churches.

The polyvalent understanding of the parables has much appeal to me. If the parables are to speak to the 20th century mind, they must be allowed to provide meanings which go beyond their 1st century setting. The parables, by their open-ended nature, call for multiple interpretations. The genius of the parables in their ability to stay relevant through the centuries is that they are open-ended, whereby each listener makes application to his or her own life. Understanding the parables as metaphors which create participation and personal application has been especially helpful to me. Translating this understanding into preaching and teaching should prove challenging and, hopefully, fruitful. Experiencing the parables as language events, allowing them to bring God's reign into being, will keep their dynamic influence flowing.

In the next chapter I will take a close look at two parables of Jesus in an attempt to discover what recent parable research has to say about them. Much has been written about the parables of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan and the Sower. I have intentionally chosen to examine two of the more obscure parables, the parable of the Lost Sheep and the parable of the Vineyard Workers, to see if the various theories of parable study can shed light on their interpretations.

CHAPTER 3

INTERPRETATIONS OF TWO PARABLES

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

The Text

Matthew 18:12-13	Luke 15:4-6	Gospel of Thomas 107
What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray,	So he told them this parable, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them,	Jesus said, The Kingdom is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them went astray; it was the largest.
does he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills,	does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness,	He left the ninety-nine
and go in search of the one that went astray?	and go after the one which is lost,	and sought for the one
And if he finds it,	until he finds it?	until he found it.
truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.	And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.	
	And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep, which was lost."	After he had exerted himself, he said to the sheep, "I love you more than the ninety-nine."[1]
So it is not the will of my Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.	Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance.	

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[1] The Gospel of Thomas (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) 53-55.

The three variant versions, above, tell of a shepherd who has

a flock of a hundred sheep, and when one becomes lost, leaves ninety-

nine behind and goes to search for the lost one. Matthew leaves some

doubt as to whether or not the lost sheep is found when he writes,

"And if he finds it . . . ," whereas Luke and the Gospel of Thomas are

more definite with the statement, "until he finds (found) it." Matthew

and Luke both stress the joy of the shepherd when the lost sheep is

found, but only Luke adds that the joy is shared by friends, neighbors

and even heaven itself. Matthew and Luke also introduce the parable

with a question, stated in such a way as to imply a negative answer.

The Gospel of Thomas introduces the parable by making it a parable of

the Kingdom, "The Kingdom is like a shepherd . . . ," and concludes it

by a statement of the shepherd to the sheep, "I love you more than the

ninety-nine."

Establishment of the correct text for this parable is contin-

gent upon an understanding of its content.

The Contexts   The Gospel writers of Matthew and Luke place the

parable of the Lost Sheep in two different contexts. Matthew has Jesus

address the parable to the disciples, calling them to account for the

welfare of the weak in faith and those who wander from the flock. In

the words of Jeremias, the concluding words of Matthew's text mean, "It

is God's will that you should go after your apostate brother as per-

sistently as the shepherd of the parable seeks the lost sheep."[2] I

[2]Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1972) 39, 40.

concur with this assessment by Jeremias. According to Luke, the telling of the parable was occasioned by the statement of the Pharisees and scribes, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." (Lk. 15:12) Thus, the parable is addressed to the enemies of Jesus as a means of vindicating the gospel. Jeremias writes,

> It was with the object of justifying the gospel against its critics that Jesus asserted by means of a parable that, just as a shepherd, gathering his flock into the fold, rejoices over the lost sheep that he has found, so God rejoices over the repentant sinner. He rejoices because he can forgive. That, says Jesus, is why I receive sinners.[3]

The shepherd statements of Jesus in John 10, where Jesus claims to be the Good Shepherd, are also addressed to the Pharisees. Jeremias believes that "Luke has preserved the original situation, "Whereas Matthew's parable "is a secondary, wholly artificial composition, built up out of a collection of isolated sayings, an expansion of the corresponding Marcan collection in Mark 9:33-50."[4] There is a strong tendency in the Gospel accounts to change parables which Jesus addressed to the crowd or to his opponents into parables addressed to disciples, a tendency which suggests that Luke's account of this parable is more reliable or original than Matthew's.[5]

The Gospel of Thomas does not place the parable of the Lost Sheep in a specific context from the life of Jesus. This Coptic Gospel groups the parables together as a collection of sayings given as instruction for the true gnostics. The collection of sayings does

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[3]Ibid., 40.   [4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., 41, 42

however provide a type of context for each parable. Tolbert writes,

> As one reads the Gospel of Thomas through, it gradually becomes apparent that the material has special foci which begin to influence one's interpretation of the individual sayings. Such a context, though subtle, is none the less effective.[6]

The parable of the Lost Sheep is followed in the Gospel of Thomas by four sayings pertaining to things hidden and found, including a parallel version of the parable of the Hidden Treasure, providing some context.[7]

The parable of the Lost Sheep appears, in the Gospel of Matthew, in the larger context of a series of loosely connected sayings dealing mutual responsibilities in the life of the Christian community. The train of thought moves from the terrible wrong of causing "one of these little ones who believe in me to sin," (Matt. 18:5) to "it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." (Matt. 18:14) In the Gospel of Luke the parable is followed by two other parables dealing with the lost, the parable of the Lost Coin (Lk. 15:8-10), and the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32). The parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are often considered as twin parables of discovery and joy, showing a persistent search and joyful redemption. The close similarity of these two parables strengthens the authenticity of Luke's context.

Stein points out that the three parables dealing with the lost contain a further thread of similarity, in addition to the theme of redemption.

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[6] Mary Ann Tolbert, Perspectives on the Parables (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 57.

[7] The Gospel of Thomas (Logia 108, 109, 110, 111) 55.

Understood in the context of the first _Sitz_ _im_ _Leben_, these para-
bles are more than just simply examples of God's redeeming love.
They are both an apology and a proclamation. They are an apology
or defense of Jesus' behavior in associating with publicans,
sinners, and harlots, and they are a proclamation that in this
activity God is now visiting his people in fulfillment of the Old
Testament promises.[8]

It becomes obvious that the context accepted for the parable of the

Lost Sheep, or any other parable, definitely effects the interpretation

given to the parable.

Historical Background   The motif of sheep and shepherd is a

common one throughout the Old Testament, with God often portrayed as

the wise and compassionate shepherd of his people.

He (God) will seek the person who has strayed but who remembers his
commandments the way a shepherd remembers a lost sheep (Ps. 119:
175). Sir. 18:13 pictured God as the compassionate shepherd who
turns the flock to the right path. The prophets use the image
against the leaders of the people as bad shepherds. God will send
new ones (Jer. 23:1-4). Ez 34 has the sheep pray to God that
God will relieve them of bad shepherds who have not searched for
the lost. God promises that he himself will shepherd Israel and
will set up the true Davidic king.[9]

Abraham, Moses and David are among the great Old Testament characters

who herded the flocks of the Hebrew people.

The Midrash on Exodus contains a parable about Moses which is

quite similar to Jesus' parable of the Lost Sheep.

While Moses was feeding the sheep of his father-in-law in the
wilderness, a young kid ran away; Moses followed it until it

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[8]Robert H. Stein, _An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus_
(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981) 62.

[9]Pheme Perkins, _Hearing the Parables of Jesus_ (New York:
Paulist Press, 1981) 31, 32.

reached a ravine, where it found a well to drink from. When Moses got up to it, he said, I did not know that you ran away because you were thirsty. Now you must be weary. He took the kid on his shoulders and carried it back. Then God said, Because you have shown pity in leading back one of a flock belonging to a man, you shall lead my flock, Israel.[10]

The shepherd was still a common figure of New Testament Palestine. The role of shepherd, however, was often despised by the religious leaders. By the nature of his calling the shepherd had to wander with his flocks in distant lands and, as a result, could not observe many of the rules and regulations of the Jewish faith. One religious rule was that compensation for wrongdoing had to be made before repentance could be complete. The sheep often jumped fences and ate from fields belonging to other people. The shepherds did not even know how many fields their sheep had eated from, thus they could not compensate for the losses.[11]

The shepherds of Palestine often kept two or more flocks of sheep together at night in a common sheep fold, with the shepherds taking turns watching the fold. The sheep folds had no doors, only an open space where the sheep went in and out. At night the shepherds lay across the openings to their folds, protecting the sheep from the marauders with their own bodies. Each shepherd collected his sheep from the common fold in the morning and brought them back that evening. A Palestinian shepherd counted his sheep each time he returned them to the fold to make certain all returned safely. A shepherd often owned

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[10]W. O. E. Oesterly, The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1938) 181.

[11]William Barclay, And Jesus Said (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970) 179.

his own flock, varying in size from 20 to 200 sheep. When a flock was too large for one man to handle, additional shephers were employed to serve as watchmen. A shepherd served as constant protector for the sheep in his charge.[12]

> If a sheep was ill he must tend it and often the shepherd might have been seen tramping home with a sheep on his shoulders or a lamb in the bosom of his sheepskin robe. If a sheep died the shepherd was bound to produce its fleece to show how it had died. If a sheep was lost the shepherd must seek until he found it. The shepherds were experts in tracking sheep from their hoof-prints and often would trace a sheep for miles.[13]

From my experiences working for sheep ranchers as a youth I learned that sheep are extremely helpless animals and when one strays from the flock and becomes lost, it usually lies down in a secluded spot, waiting to be found. When the shepherd locates the sheep it will often continue to remain in its seemingly frozen position. Jeremias describes this situation as follows:

> Hence there is nothing for the shepherd to do but to carry it, and over long distances this can only be done by putting it on his shoulders, i.e. round his neck; he grasps its fore- and hind-legs with each hand, or if he needs one hand free for his shepherd's staff, he holds all four legs with one hand firmly against his breast.[14]

A question is raised in the mind of the reader of the parable of the Lost Sheep in regard to the ninety-nine sheep left behind, apparently unattended. It would be foolish to jeopardize the lives of ninety-nine sheep for the sake of one. This is why the answer to Jesus' question by his first century listeners would logically be,

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[12]Jeremias, 133.   [13]Barclay, 179.

[14]Jeremias, 134.

"Of course not - a shepherd simply does not risk ninety-nine sheep for the sake of one." One possible explanation is that a hundred sheep are more than one shepherd can safely tend alone, thus he must have had an assistant who stayed behind with the ninety-nine. Another explanation is that the shepherd did not discover the missing sheep until a count was taken in the evening when sheep and shepherd returned to the safety of the fold.[15] The Gospel of Thomas provides another possible explanation by saying the missing sheep was the largest and most beloved of all the sheep. The emotion involved with having lost the favorite sheep would have caused the shepherd to risk all for the sake of one.[16] Tolbert flatly states, "The parable of the Lost Sheep as it presently reads in both Luke and Matthew is clearly not a realistic reflection of the actions of a first-century Palestinian shepherd."[17]

Literary Criticism Recent scholarly activity has little to say about the literary qualities of the parable of the Lost Sheep. Crossan classifies the parable as a parable of advent (see page #38 above), stressing discovery and joy. Stein classifies it as a "similitude" which, he says, begins with a general statement of a daily occurrence, "What man of you" (Lk. 15:4) and then goes on to compare the Kingdom of God with this occurrence.[18] Via notes that a parable which begins with a question, as this parable does in both Matthew and Luke, becomes a language event in that it calls for a judgment from the listeners.

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[15]Ibid., 133.

[17]Ibid., 56.

[16]Tolbert, 56, 57.

[18]Stein, 19.

> The judgment which is evoked by the parables entails a far-reaching
> decision, for the pre-understanding of the hearers is challenged,
> and they must decide between their old understanding and the new
> one that confronts them in the parable.[19]:

The parable of the Lost Sheep also acts as a language event in that it

introduces new possibilities for the listeners. "What shepherd would

leave ninety-nine sheep to find a lost one?"

The parable appears to function well, in the terms of Crossan,

FcFague and others, as a metaphor - shattering accepted world concepts,

creating participation, and holding meaning for the listeners within

itself.

Interpretation   In the traditional, allegorical sense the

shepherd represents God or Jesus and the lost sheep represents either

a sinner who is separated from God or a Christian who has strayed from

the Church. When the lost individual has been found, and returned to

the fold, there is much rejoicing by God, the Church, and the angels of

heaven. The description of Jesus as Good Shepherd, already noted, makes

it natural for the interpreter to draw the conclusion that Jesus is the

shepherd in this parable. The Gospel portraits of Jesus also show him

as one who is concerned for and seeks out the lost. Matthew's context,

as has been noted, leads one to identify the lost one as a follower of

Jesus who has wandered from the fellowship. Luke's context describes

the lost one as a sinner who needs repentance. It is interesting to

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[19]Dan Otto Via, Jr., The Parables (Philadelphia: Fortress
Press, 1967) 53.

note, in this connection, that repentance equals being found, not turning away from sin. This appears to be a new and radical definition of repentance.[20]

The first hearers of the parable were likely the scribes and Pharisees, if one accepts Luke's context as most original. The impact of the parable upon these hearers is uncertain. If the critics saw the parable as a defense of Jesus' behavior in associating with sinners, they were likely not convinced by his defense. It would take more than this parable to convince the Pharisees that it was all right for a Jewish teacher to associate with sinners. If the critics saw the parable as a proclamation by Jesus that God was now visiting his people, reaching out with his redeeming love to find the lost and to rejoice when the lost were found, they would likely be dumbfounded by the gall of Jesus. This second interpretation would make the Pharisees angry and more determined to kill Jesus.

The second hearers of the parable were the Christian community, represented in our present texts of Matthew and Thomas. If these hearers thought of the parable as encouragement for them to reach to the lost, they would likely react in a positive manner and strive to heed the advice. If they thought of the parable in an allegorical sense, with God as the shepherd seeking the lost, they would likely rejoice in the parable and the gracious acts of God. The Gospel of Thomas handles the parable as a simile of the Kingdom of God, describing what things are _like_ in the Kingdom.

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[20]Kenneth Bailey, "New Perspectives on the Parables" (Beirut: Near East School of Theology, 1972) Thesis Cassette tape.

What, then, is the meaning and significance of the parable of the Lost Sheep to the modern reader?

John Crossan acknowledges that traditionally the parable of the Lost Sheep has been interpreted as "telling how God and/or Jesus searches for the lost and the sinful, in other words, for us."[21] He raises doubts about this interpretation, as follows:

> . . . tradition never applied the same interpretation to the twin parable of the Lost Coin so that, God and/or Jesus being again the seeker, Jesus might be made to announce: "I am the good housewife." The reason is, I presume, obvious to all, but it does serve to cast doubt on the tradition's handling of the lost sheep. It would seem much better, however, to take the "joy" which accompanies the discovery of the treasure in Matt. 13:44 as the same "joy" which accompanies the finding of the lost sheep and the lost coin in Luke 15:5, 6, 9. These parables image what we must find even if it is true that it is a finding of that by which we were already and always found.[22]

Crossan's argument regarding the parable of the Lost Coin is, in my estimation, rather weak. Jesus could be the seeker in the parable without being called the "good housewife." Crossan's argument on "joy", however, is quite tenable, especially in the Lukan context. In Luke the emphasis is given to rejoicing over repentant sinners. Functioning as a metaphor of normalcy this parable draws hearers into the story until they participate in rejoicing. In Matthew's context "joy" occupies a minor role and in Thomas it is nonexitent. In Matthew and Thomas the emphasis can be seen as the duty of Christians to seek out the lost and weak whom God loves. If hearers find a responsible role in the Kingdom as seekers through this parable, it functions for them as a metaphor.

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[21] John Dominic Crossan, In Parables (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 38.

[22] Ibid.

The parable serves well as a language event calling listeners
to the judgment of old understandings and to decision, whether those
listeners are Pharisees, ancient Christians or modern Christians, and
whether the shepherd is seen as God/Jesus who does the seeking and
rejoicing or the Christian of any age. As a language event this
parable reveals the grace and love of God drawing hearers into joyous
relationship with God. When fully receptive to the language of this
parable hearers are moved to act in behalf of the "lost" and to
rejoice when the lost are found.

The parable of the Lost Sheep carries at least two distinct
messages to hearers, depending upon interpretation. If interpreted
in the traditional way it is God/Jesus who does the seeking with
hearers participating in rejoicing. If interpreted metaphorically it
is the hearers who participate in both the seeking and rejoicing.
The parable appears to function as a language event with either
interpretation. In my estimation, both the traditional and metaphor-
ical interpretations are viable and applicable to Christian preaching.

The Parable of the Vineyard Workers

The Text   The parable of the Vineyard Workers, also known as
the parable of the Good Employer, is recorded only in Matt. 20:1-16.

> For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out
> early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2After
> agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them
> into his vineyard. 3And going out about the third hour he saw
> others standing idle in the market place; 4and to them he said,
> 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give
> you.' So they went. 5Going out again about the sixth hour and
> the ninth hour, he did the same. 6And about the eleventh hour he
> went out and found others standing: and he said to them, 'Why do
> you stand here idle all day?' 7They said to him, 'Because no one

has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'
8And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his
steward, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning
with the last, up to the first.' 9And when those hired about the
eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. 10Now when
the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of
them also received a denarius. 11And on receiving it they grum-
bled at the householder, 12saying, 'These last worked only one
hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden
of the day and the scorching heat.' 13But he replied to one of
them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me
for a denarius? 14Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to
give to this last as I give to you. 15Am I not allowed to do
what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my
generosity? 16So the last will be first, and the first last."

There is general consensus among scholars that the last verse, 20:16,

was not part of the original parable. This verse is repeated here

from Matt. 19:30, in reverse order, which in turn is repeated from

Mk. 10:31. Lk. 13:30 also makes use of this statement in an entirely

different context. The statement was evidently a popular proverb.

Most scholars conclude the parable with 20:15, however Crossan argues

"that the original parable ended with the rhetorical question of

20:13,"[23] suggesting that Matthew added verses 14f to draw out the

point of the story and place the householder in the position of just-

ifying himself. It is possible that Matthew added verses 14 and 15

for the reasons suggested by Crossan, but I am inclined to agree with

those who see the parable ending with verse 15. Verse 15 appears to

me as an integral part of the parable. I agree that verse 16, a

popular proverb of the time, was added to the parable. The proverb

blunts the point of the parable calling attention to an irrelevant

fact that the workers who came last are paid first.

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[23]Ibid., 112.

<u>Context</u>   The parable of the Vineyard Workers appears in Mat-
thew's larger context during a period when Jesus was in transit from

Galilee to Jerusalem for the final days of his life (Matt. 19:1-20:34).

Crossan points out a "close contextual and conceptual relationship

between Matt. 19:16-30, the story of the rich man, and Matt. 20:1-15,

which immediately follows it. This shows up most explicitly in the

repetition of 19:30 in 20:16."[24]   The chapter division between Matt. 19

and 20 is misleading. The parable comes at the end of a discussion

between Jesus and the disciples concerning the rewards of the believer

in the new world. The Matthean context stresses a reversal of reward.

The parable, however, does not contain a reversal of reward since all

the workers receive the same reward. It would appear that the parable

does not fit well into the larger context of Matthew since it omits

the reversal of reward and "focuses upon an element the narrative

completely lacks."[25]   The parable is immediately followed, in verses

17-19, with the third prediction by Jesus of his approaching passion.

While these verses fit well into the total movement of Jesus in chap-

ters 19 and 20, they do not have a direct correlation with the parable

of the Vineyard Workers.

Jeremias believes that the original parable of Jesus, ending

with 20:15, was "clearly addressed to those who resembled the murmur-

ers, those who criticized and opposed the good news, Pharisees for

example. Jesus was minded to show them how unjustified, hateful,

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[24]Ibid., 113.   [25]Tolbert, 60.

loveless and unmerciful was their criticism."[26] The parable was used

in its original context to vindicate the gospel against its opponents

and critics. Matthew, then, placed the parable in a new context with

a different audience. Matthew, as 19:27 indicates, has Jesus address

this parable to the disciples. Jeremias sees this change of audience

as natural since Matthew, removed by a period of years from the original

setting of the parable, needed to apply to the Church that which Jesus

originally addressed to his enemies. The Church today finds itself in

a similar position as Matthew. Matthew's change of audience in this

parable is identical to the change which he apparently makes in the

parable of the Lost Sheep.

Literary Analysis   The parable of the Vineyard Workers makes

use of a parallel plot, fostering comparison. The first action begins

and ends with the householder hiring workers and giving instructions

about their payment (vv. 1-8), and then the second action begins and

ends with payment at the end of the day and the grumbling workers

expressing indignation (vv. 9-15). This action is similar to that

found in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Via points out that the plot movement in the parable moves

downward from the well-being of the full-day workers to their being

sent home, thus giving it the character of a tragic parable. However,

from the theme of the parable, with comic characters being hired at the

end of the day and benefiting from the generosity of the householder,

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[26]Jeremias, 38.

he classifies this as a comic parable.[27] Crossan, on the other hand,

classifies this as a parable of action. (See above, page #38)

Jeremias thinks that, like the Prodigal Son, this parable

focuses on the full-day workers and seeks to reconcile these workers

with those who have received a generous gift from the householder.

Crossan sees the parable focusing on the householder and is thus a

story of divine generosity. Via sees the parable focusing on both the

householder and the full-day workers.

> There is a real sense, however, in which this parable is the house-
> holder's story, and this fact gives it its allegorical tendency.
> The householder probably has a relatively more prominent role
> throughout the story than the "master" figure in any of the other
> narrative parables . . . . There is, on the other hand, another
> sense in which this parable is the story of the grumbling, full-
> day workers; and exegesis has usually not been sufficiently
> attentive to this fact.[28]

I agree with Via in that the emphasis can be given either to the house-

holder or to the full-day workers, thus giving the parable two viable

interpretations. The point at which one enters this parable determines

the interpretation one brings out of the parable.

The parable contains both narrative discourse, as in vv. 1, 2,

5 and 9, and direct discourse where the characters interact, as in

vv. 3, 4, 6-8, and 11-15. This feature is not unusual among the

parables of Jesus.

The parable culminates in a series of rhetorical questions

which reinforce the differences between the workers and the house-

holder. The question of 20:13, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did

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[27]Via, 150-152.　　　　　　[28]Ibid., 149, 150.

you not agree with me for a denarius?" recalls the commitment at the
beginning of the parable, in verses 2, 4, "After agreeing with the
laborers for a denarius a day . . . whatever is right I will give you."
The householder has a right to do what he pleases with his money. The
questions at the end of the parable also draw the hearers into the
parable action.

Historical Background   The economic situation reflected in the
parable is quite realistic. The underemployment of workers was as
common in the first century world in Palestine as it is yet today in
all parts of the world.[29] Underemployment and the wages to be paid
are persistent concerns in the life of any day laborer.

Henry Mitchell, speaking in a Black ghetto of Los Angeles in
1976, struck a responsive chord with his audience when he retold the
parable of the Vineyard Workers in the following way:

> Jesus told a story about laborers hired to work in a vineyard. I
> can see the picture. When I was a pastor in the cotton country
> there was a certain block where there were people standing around
> all the time - any hour. And most of them were not leisure class.
> Leisurely folk don't dress like they did. Some had paper sack
> lunches, but they were looking for no picnic. But you could tell
> what they were about if you would go down to the block at four or
> five o'clock in the morning, just before day, a big old raggedy
> bus would pull through there, and a man would hire folks to chop
> cotton. If you would watch long enough sometimes, the bus would
> come again and fill up again. They would work a long day in the
> fields and the bus would bring them back to the block around six
> or seven o'clock at night. Well this is the way it was. Jesus
> said the man hired a load and took them to the field. But he saw
> it wasn't enough, so he came back in the block three hours later
> and hired some more. It still wasn't enough and he hired still

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[29]Perkins, 140, 141.

some more. And again, even in midafternoon, and finally just an hour before quitting time, he came and hired some more.[30]

Anyone who has had to stand in line at an employment center or wait around for a job to open up in the fields can easily identify with the workers in this parable. Anyone who has been an employer can also identify with the prerogatives and moral struggle of the householder.

Interpretations The parable of the Vineyard Workers has undergone a wide variety of interpretations. Matthew, as has been noted, was the first to interpret the parable for the Church as representing the reversal of rank to take place at the day of judgment. The early Church later interpreted the parable, in a similar way to Matthew, as a parable of judgment with the message, "do not forfeit salvation by murmuring, self-justification, or rejection."[31] This interpretation was saying that many are called to the Kingdom but few are chosen. Still later, the Church began to allegorize the parable.

> Already from the time of Irenaeus the hours of the fivefold summons were taken to symbolize the periods in the history of redemption from Adam onwards; from Origen's time they symbolized the different stages of human life at which men become Christians.[32]

When the parable is interpreted as the householder's story, as Via has noted, it lends itself to allegorizing. God easily becomes the householder generously bestowing his mercy and grace on those whom he chooses, without regard to considerations of merit.

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[30]Henry H. Mitchell, The Recovery of Preaching (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977) 84.

[31]Jeremias, 34.   [32]Ibid., 33, 34.

In referring to Jülicher's one point interpretation of this parable, Norman Perrin writes: "The Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20: 1-16) is concerned with the fact that God has one salvation for all mankind, 'for high priest and aristocrat, for tax collector and prostitute.'"[33] Linnemann, in the vein of the new hermeneutic, sees this parable directed to a situation in which "Jesus stands before his listeners as one who disturbs God's order,"[34] upsetting the status quo with an appearance of goodness. Fuchs focuses on the one point of the householder's generous act and "the relationship of this act to Jesus and his understanding of his conduct as God's act."[35] Wilder sees the parable as a teaching and polemic parable "in which the revelatory-image is used to justify and defend Jesus' mission."[36] Jeremias sees the parable concerned with the vindication of the gospel against its critics, by which Jesus says in effect to the Pharisees, "Will you murmur against God's goodness?"[37] Jeremias, as noted earlier, places interpretation emphasis upon the full-day workers. Via gives a double interpretation to the parable, taking the expulsion of the full-day workers for their murmuring to illustrate why some do not receive God's grace, and noting the generosity of the householder as illustrative of

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[33]Norman Perrin, _Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom_ (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 96.

[34]Eta Linnemann, _Jesus of the Parables_ (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 87.

[35]Via, 3.

[36]Amos Wilder, _Early Christian Rhetoric_ (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 72.

[37]Jeremias, 139.

God's goodness. Crossan, as noted, interprets the parable as a story of divine graciousness and generosity.

The parable of the Vineyard Workers made real the presence, goodness and generosity of God in the daily experience of the first century world, and through interpretation continues to operate as a language event in the twentieth century world. This quality of the parable is especially true when focus is placed upon the gracious nature of God as portrayed by the householder. The parable acts as a metaphor by shattering expectations on the part of the full-day workers and by drawing hearers in each generation into the new world of God's Kingdom.

Multiple interpretations, as has been seen, are applied to the parable of the Vineyard Workers. For preaching, I prefer to place emphasis upon the goodness of God as seen through the goodness of the householder. Much could be said as well for preaching with emphasis on the full-day workers. There are many individuals in the twentieth century who continue to murmur against the goodness of God and fail to experience the grace of God.

In the next chapter the general subject of preaching will be addressed, with particular attention being given to story preaching. Chapters five and six, which follow, will focus directly upon the preaching of parables - especially the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Vineyard Workers.

CHAPTER 4

SURVEY OF STORY PREACHING

Purpose of Preaching

The purpose or function of preaching in the Christian tradition
is to communicate the gospel in a relevant and compelling manner so as
to stir souls, rekindle emotions, motivate actio and help individuals
grapple with the life-changing power of the gospel. Preaching strives
to bring about divine-human encounters, keeping people in touch with
ultimate and eternal reality.

> Preaching aspires to create a moment of revelation, a salvation
> moment in which the shoes instinctively come off because there is
> the certain knowledge that one has unexpectedly come upon holy
> ground; God and person are face-to-face.[1]

A sermon preached to a congregation does not attempt to provide all
the answers and all the truth for individuals, but it does attempt to
plant seeds and create images which will go on preaching sermons in
the minds of the hearers. Preaching restores, renews and generates
life within the hearers. Above all, preaching is the proclamation
of the Word of God, revealing God's purpose, will, grace, love and
salvation through human representatives to the end that hearers will
be brought, by God, to faith, conversion and new life.

A Theology of Preaching

Theology and preaching complement one another. Theology, the

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[1]George W. Swank, Dialogic Style in Preaching (Valley Forge:
Judson Press, 1981) 64.

study of God and His relationships with the universe and humankind, informs Christian preaching while preaching, a kerygmatic, oral activity, informs theology and brings it to expression. "Theology monitors the church's proclamation of the gospel. Indeed, theology only has a job to do because of the nature and task of preaching."[2] The preacher proclaims Christian doctrine which has been examined, clarified and systematized by the science of theology. Without theological reflection a preacher can quickly stray from the center of faith, losing substance, coherence and authority. Preaching, on the other hand, has a tendancy to keep drawing theology back to a practical level where it speaks to the needs of people. Preaching also reminds theology of its oral and worship-centered beginnings.[3]

Preaching is a theological discipline through which theological truths are conveyed to a congregation. Preaching brings theology to expression, relating it in meaningful ways to a particular setting, time and people.

Preaching, like theology itself, is centered in God. He is both the object and the subject of preaching. His Word is proclaimed and, through His representatives, He speaks. Karl Barth, in noting the essential characteristics of preaching, writes:

> When the Gospel is preached, God speaks: there is no question of the preacher revealing anything or of a revelation being conveyed through him. It is necessary, in all circumstances, to have regard to the fact that God has revealed himself (Epiphany) and will reveal himself (Parousia). Whatever happens by means of preaching

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[2]Richard Lischer, A Theology of Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981). 17, 18.

[3]Ibid., 18-27.

- in the interval between the first and the second coming - is due
to its divine subject. Revelation is a closed system in which God
is the subject, the object, and the middle term.[4]

In preaching, the preacher becomes the secondary subject or the spokes-

person for God. As God has spoken through the prophets, through Christ,

and through the apostles, He continues to speak through those whom He

sends as messengers of good news to His people.[5] Rudolf Bultmann

writes concerning the preacher's role, as follows:

> Proclamation is _personal address_. It is authoritative address,
> the address of the word of God, which, paradoxically, is spoken
> by a man, the preacher. As God's representative, the preacher
> stands over against the congregation. He does not speak as its
> voice nor does he bring to consciousness or to clear expression
> whatever may slumber in his hearers in the way of ideals and
> feelings, yearnings or even unexpressed certainties. To be sure,
> he can do all this, but only in order to confront his hearers
> with the word of God, to place them under the shifting and judging
> power of the word and therewith under the promise of grace.[6]

I believe that preaching begins and ends with God. It is His message

which calls for proclamation; His Word which must be heard.

The Word of God is present in the world in both written and

living form. The written Word of God is, of course, the Bible, a

consummation of both divine and human authorship. The Bible, in turn,

contains the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. The preacher proclaims

the truths of the written Word of God which point relentlessly toward

the living Word.

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[4]Karl Barth, _The Preaching of the Gospel_ (Philadelphia:
Westminster Press, 1963) 12.

[5]Matt. 4:4; 10:20; 17:5; Rom. 10:17; I Thess. 2:13; II Cor. 5:20.

[6]Rudolf Bultmann, "General Truths and Christian Proclamation," in
Robert W. Funk (ed.) _History and Hermeneutic_ (New York: Harper & Row,
1967) 153.

Jesus, as the living Word of God, is the primary person through whom God has chosen to speak to the world. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, . . ."[8] Christian preaching is anchored in the story of Jesus and the message he spoke. It focuses, especially, on the cross and the empty tomb. "Christian preaching was born in the resurrection of Jesus . . . . It was resurrection that validated Jesus' ministry, his announcement of the Kingdom, his ethical teachings, and finally his death."[9] The message of Christian preaching, the kerygma, announces the good news of a resurrected Christ.

The Holy Spirit, in addition to God and Jesus Christ, has a significant role in Christian preaching. "The Father is the source of the Word, He who pronounces it; the Son is the Word which the Father speaks; and this Word communicates the mysteries explored and penetrated by the Holy Spirit."[10] The Holy Spirit serves as an interpreter, "the great Hermeneut,"[11] guiding the preacher's understanding and application of the revealed Word.

> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.[12]

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[8]Heb. 1:1,2a.

[9]Lischer, 30.

[10]Domenico Grasso, *Proclaiming God's Message* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965) 45.

[11]Lischer, 96.

[12]I Cor. 2:12, 13.

Christian preaching, through the centuries, has been inseparably tied to the Church. The Church owes its existence to preaching. While calling people to faith preaching also calls people to the Church, the community of faith. Barth writes:

> Preaching, when it is true to what God has revealed to us, effects reconciliation; and wherever men receive this Word, there is the Church, the assembly of those who have been called by the Lord. Not general reflections on man and the cosmos but Revelation is the only legitimate ground for preaching. Because this call is sounded and men are able to hear it, the Church exists. Thus the bond which links preaching to the Church results directly from its faithfulness to Revelation.[13]

Preaching, in addition, consolidates the Church and helps develop Christian maturity among the members. On the other hand, preaching is sponsored by the Church and usually comes to expression in the context of worship.

Preaching is closely connected to the liturgy and sacraments of worship. "Preaching proclaims what liturgy fulfills. The former presents the divine plan of salvation and invites man to the encounter with God; the latter is where the encounter takes place."[14] The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, physically and visibly performed, also provide encounter with God. Preaching the Word and the sacraments of the Word, though separate, stand together. Again, Barth writes:

> Preaching, then, is given within that Church where the sacrament of grace (baptism) and the sacrament of hope (Lord's Supper) are operative, but each partakes at once of the character of grace and hope, for neither sacrament nor preaching has significance except within the Church, where each is authenticated by its relation to the other. Preaching, in fact, derives its substance

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[13]Barth, 22.   [14]Grasso, 119.

from the sacrament which itself refers to an action in the total
event of Revelation. Preaching is a commentary on and an inter-
pretation of the sacrament, having the same meaning but in words.[15]

In my experience as a preacher I have often been impressed by the close

interrelationship of preaching and the sacraments. Worship, for me,

is incomplete when preaching and sacrament do not accompany one another.

A theology _of_ preaching, as I see it, encompasses a theology

for preaching which includes, as central elements, the three persons of

the Trinity, the Church and the sacraments.

Communication Through Preaching

The effectiveness of preaching for communicating the gospel is

debatable. Communication takes place when there is a meeting of minds

and emotions, but such a meeting does not always occur between a

preacher and the hearers. The truth a preacher intends to convey does

not always reach the hearers. Such lack of communication is sometimes

the fault of the hearers and sometimes the fault of the preacher.

Clyde Reid tells of a survey taken in 1964 in New England at a United

Church of Christ at the close of a morning worship. Two hundred seventy

one people answered questions pertaining to the sermon.

> Fifty-six per cent felt the minister's sermon was "superior" and
> another 35 per cent felt it was "good." However, only 21 per cent
> could reflect the minister's central message clearly and accurately,
> and 40 per cent omitted any reply at all when asked what that
> message had been.[16]

The listening efficiency of this congregation, I have a feeling, is

typical of many American congregations of all denominations. A preacher

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[15]Barth, 23. (The brackets are mine.)

[16]Clyde Reid, _The Empty Pulpit_ (New York: Harper & Row, 1967)
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who presents a sermon in a dull and lifeless manner, with poor pronunciation of words in a voice that cannot be adequately heard, with little emotional color, definitely shares the guilt of ineffective communication.

Improving the effectiveness of communication through preaching is the shared responsibility of both preacher and hearers. The preacher, as the source of communication, brings to a sermon his/her communication skills, attitudes, knowledge and background. The message prepared by the preacher contains words, sentences, and ideas to convey its content. The preacher searches for persuasive, precise language, along with illustrations, stories, narrative language, symbols and images to best express the central idea of the message. The message is presented or channeled to the hearers through the preacher's voice, gestures and body language. Members of the congregation receive the message and decode or translate it into meaningful discourse. Those who receive the message bring to it their own listening skills, attitudes, background, prejudices and knowledge.[17] Communication takes place as meaningful interchange or interaction transpires between preacher and congregation. Communication is strengthened as the preacher improves the source, message and channel of communication and the congregation members improve their ability to receive and respond to the message.

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[17] George R. Fitzgerald, A Practical Guide to Preaching (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) 83-87. (Fitzgerald examines several theories of communication as they apply to preaching.)

Form of the Message

Communication in preaching is definitely influenced by sermon form or structure. The traditional form of sermons in Protestant preaching has had deductive movement. In deductive sermons the central thesis or proposition is stated at the beginning and then supported or proven by the sermon development with major divisions and sub-divisions. This form, in effect, places the conclusion to the sermon first. These sermons are often authoritarian in approach, containing instructions and admonitions for the hearers. Traditional, deductive, sermons are often presented as a monologue. And, monological communication has certain weaknesses. Research has pointed out that monological mass communication is effective for reinforcing existing attitudes and ideas but ineffective for converting attitudes on controversial issues or for influencing behavior in a new direction.[18] This research has important implications for a preacher, as it points out that deductive preaching is helpful for reinforcing faith but not the best tool for leading people to faith or for changing their attitudes.

The best way to help individuals comprehend new ideas, leading to acceptance, internalization and action, is through two-way communication or dialogue. Dialogical preaching takes place when a dialogue is created involving God, the preacher, and the hearers.

A number of innovative sermon forms have been developed in recent years to help create dialogical preaching. Some preachers have brought the hearers into dialogue with the text and sermon by encouraging a small group to study and reflect on the sermon text prior to

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[18]Reid, 82, 83.

writing the sermon and/or having feedback and discussion by the con-
gregation following the sermon. Sermon forms which lend themselves to
dialogue are a self-debate by the preacher, a two-person dialogue
sermon, a sermon structured with "not this, or this, or this, but this"
development, and sermons developed as narratives or stories.[19]

Theory Behind Story Preaching

The narrative, or story, sermon is one of the most recent
developments in homiletical research. In 1958 H. Grady Davis published
Design for Preaching in which he pointed out the extensive use of
narrative in scripture, with the gospel appearing "in the form of a
story told."[20] Advocating the dictum that form follows function in
sermon content and shape, Davis suggested one form of preaching should
be as "a story told." Davis pointed to Peter Marshall as one who
preached in narrative form. In 1970 Charles Rice published Interpre-
tation and Imagination, in which he advocated story sermons. He
stated that "contemporary literature and Christian theology agree in
the forms they suggest for preaching: story, a proper sequence between
grace and ethics, indirection and understatement, the man as message."[21]
The last chapter of Rice's book is simply called "Sermons." His five
sermons are based on Biblical texts but their story-lines are taken
from a poem, a play, two novels, and a movie. The stories he retells

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[19]George E. Sweazey, Preaching the Good News (Englewood Cliffs:
Prentice-Hall, 1976) 82-93.

[20]H. Grady Davis, Design for Preaching (Philadelphia: Muhlen-
berg Press, 1958) 157-162.

[21]Charles L. Rice, Interpretation and Imagination (Philadel-
phia: Fortress Press, 1970) 75.

become the sermons, with applications and interpretations woven in.

The homiletical books of the 1970s reveal a continuing concern for communication and story sermons. Among those who wrote about the use of story in preaching were Clyde Fant, Clement Welsh, Foster McCurley, Elizabeth Achtemeier, Fred Craddock, Ronald Sleeth, Milton Crum, and Frederick Buechner. In 1980 Edmund Steimle, Morris Niedenthal and Charles Rice published a book, Preaching the Story, in which the whole theme of preaching as shared story is emphasized. "Preaching is shared story, and the vocation is learned best among people who share their stories and The Story with each other."[22] Steimle sees story preaching as rehearsing The Story of the gospel, telling the story of the text. Instead of explaining the text verse by verse, making applications and arguments, as in expository preaching, Steimle tells the story of the text in an innovative way, adding other stories and dramatic descriptions.

> So the fabric of the sermon, by reflecting more faithfully the fabric of the biblical source of its message in its secularity, its dialogical character, its dramatic story-form in the indicative mood, and its lean and spare style, may speak to the person come of age in terms which will give the gospel a hearing at least, even if in their freedom some persons may well reject it.[23]

Preaching the Story limits story preaching to biblical narrative, excluding other types of story sermons. In 1980, also, Richard A. Jensen published a book, Telling the Story, in which he devotes a chapter and his major emphasis to "Story Preaching." Jensen describes

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[22]Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, Preaching the Story (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 15.

[23]Ibid., 174.

six characteristics of story sermons:

1. The biblical text is treated as a particular configuration of literary form and content which has serious implications for our contemporary recasting of the text.
2. The story is the preaching itself.
3. The aim of the sermon is the participation and involvement of the listener in the gospel story.
4. Stories function in the indirect mode of communication.
5. Story preaching is open-ended.
6. Faith is evoked by the eucatastrophic experience.[24]

Jensen suggests that the "serious implications for our contemporary recasting of the text," as noted in number 1, above, is that story sermons ought to remain faithful to the form and content of a biblical text. He describes the "eucatastrophic experience," noted above, as a "good turn"[25] in a story - a common characteristic in the gospel.

Jensen makes suggestions in his book for writing story sermons and includes three that he has preached. He begins with the text and writes a contemporary story elucidating the text. He believes it is helpful to tell the stories of people with whom the hearers can identify, and, at times, to use autobiographical statements or format. "A simple way to begin story preaching is by creating stories that parallel the biblical text and letting the congregation make the connections between text and story."[26] He also believes it is helpful to make use of basic storytelling techniques in story sermons, such as the use of visual clues, silence, facial expressions, eye movements and gestures.

Jensen's story sermon, "The Lonely Lady of Blairstown Park,"

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[24]Richard A. Jensen, Telling the Story (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980) 126-147.

[25]Ibid., 148.   [26]Ibid., 157.

based on the parable of the Prodigal Son, is a contemporary story with authentic people, containing the message of the parable. The story is the sermon and is left open-ended. A portion of the parable is read at the close of the sermon. Rice's story sermon, "The First and the Last," contained in Interpretation and Imagination, is similar to Jensen's sermon. Rice treats the doctrine of the second coming in this sermon by combining the eschatological motifs in the book of Revelation with a novel and an original parable. He weaves the novel, parable and scripture together in a way that makes the sermon hard to follow, yet the total message becomes understandable at the conclusion. Rice also leaves his sermon open-ended. Both sermons draw on contemporary reality while teaching gospel truths, and both follow the "story told" type of sermon.

Fred B. Craddock and Story Sermons

Fred Craddock produced two books in the 1970's which had wide influence for dialogical preaching and story sermons: As One Without Authority (1974) and Overhearing the Gospel (1978). In his books, Craddock acknowledges the crisis in modern preaching and the problems incumbent within the traditional forms of preaching. He points out the difference between deductive and inductive preaching, emphasizing the strengths and values of the latter. Though not the first to write about inductive preaching, Craddock was first to expand upon this concept to the extent of showing how inductive movement provides positive influence for sermon imagination, unity, text and structure.

While deductive thought moves from general truth to particular

application, inductive thought moves the opposite direction, from

particular truth to general application. In applying inductive move-

ment to preaching, Craddock writes,

> the inductively moving sermon is more descriptive than hortatory,
> more marked by the affirmative than the imperative, with the
> realization, of course, that the strongest of all imperatives is
> a clear affirmative that has been embraced.[27]

Inductive preaching provides one or more concrete experiences, with

the general conclusion being drawn only at the end of the message.

The preacher has an advantage in being able to gain the interest of

the hearers early in a sermon with particular, specific, life stories.

Once engaged in the message, the hearers move with the preacher

through the sermon, fitting together the pieces of a unifying theme,

arriving at a conclusion which belongs to the hearers as well as the

preacher. In allowing the hearers to participate in the conclusion,

drawing their own conclusions, the inductive movement provides anticipa-

tion fulfilled and encourages hearers to draw upon spiritual resources

they already possess.

Craddock raises and answers several objections pertaining to

inductive preaching. One is the objection "that the method here

advocated opens the door to semi-preparedness on the part of the

preacher."[28] This is a valid objection, Craddock points out, in that

a preacher can be lazy using this method as well as any other method

of preaching. If the preacher really engages the text, studying and

overhearing its message, stretches the imagination, and then struggles

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[27] Fred B. Craddock, As One Without Authority (Enid: Phillips University Press, 1974) 58.

[28] Ibid., 66.

with making the text live for the hearers, inductive preaching will take as much work as any other method. A second objection is that there must be something "unethical" about "sneaking up on the congregation"[29] with Biblical material or truths when they are not looking. Craddock argues that the element of surprise is simply a way of making the sermon more interesting. A third objection is that this method may "make the Word of God dependent on the listener."[30] Craddock argues that the Word of God or Gospel is not Truth in and of itself, but Truth for the individual. With this method the preacher needs to trust the hearers to understand and appropriate the Truth for themselves. A final objection asks the question: "does the inductive method of preaching effect change?"[31] Once more Craddock argues that while the inductive method is inconclusive from a logical point of view, it does help hearers reflect on life in a new way and make life changing decisions.

The use of the imagination and images from life, encompassing the emotions of life, has an obvious role in the inductive movement of preaching. The preacher has need to cultivate a creative imagination with insights drawn from the experiences and relationships of life. Craddock suggests several guiding principles for the use of images in preaching.

> First, let the selection of images to be shared be drawn from the world of experience known to the hearers and let these images be cast in forms recognizable as real and possible.
> Secondly, as far as possible, let the preacher use words and phrases that image specific and concrete relations and responses.
> Thirdly, the principle of economy in the use of words, especially adjectives and adverbs, is invariably a sound one.

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[29]Ibid., 67.   [30]Ibid., 69.   [31]Ibid., 72.

A _fourth_ guiding principle for conveying to others images received is to avoid all self-conscious interruptions in narration and description.
A _fifth_ and final principle: . . . the language used is to be one's own.[32]

In addition to the lively use of images, Craddock contends that unity is especially important for inductive movement in preaching. The selection of a single theme helps to release the imagination of the preacher and contributes to the interest and active participation of the hearers. "The desired unity has been gained when the preacher can state his central germinal idea in one single affirmative sentence."[33] Discovering the germinal idea of a particular text takes careful exegesis and interpretation. Craddock discusses six ways a preacher may approach a text in preparing an inductive message.

First, let it be the text itself which he first confronts, not dictionaries and commentaries about the text.
Second, let the engagement with the text be a lively one, with real questions being asked.
Third, listen carefully to the text.
A _fourth_ guideline for dealing with the text in sermon preparation continues the idea of hearing the text, but it would more properly be called 'overhear' rather than hearing . . . . hearing what the writer of the text intended to say to his readers.
Fifth, . . . once a text is selected, a decision needs to be made as to where one stands in the text. If the text is from Paul to the Thessalonians, does one stand with Paul and address the congregation as the Thessalonians, or does one stand among the Thessalonians and listen to Paul?
A _sixth_ and final suggestion . . . has to do with attitude toward the minister's own study. Time in study is, in a vital sense, time spent with all his congregation.[34]

In his book, _Overhearing the Gospel_, Craddock points out that the Bible addresses the community of faith, thus the Church needs to listen to the Bible rather than simply use it for arguments. When the

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[32]Ibid., 92-95. (The underlining is mine.)

[33]Ibid., 105.   [34]Ibid., 134-140. (The underlining is mine.)

Bible uses a story from another section, it does not simply repeat the story but retells it appropriately for the new audience. Bible stories are generally addressed to particular situations and present their messages in vivid language. The preacher can learn from the Bible itself on how to rightly handle the Word of Truth.[35]

Inductive movement in a sermon, according to Craddock, has a tendency to minimize the need for a structure containing divisions and points, as is common in deductive preaching. "In the case of inductive preaching, the structure must be subordinate to movement. In fact, this subordination means that in most cases the structure is not visible to the congregation."[36] The primary structure for an inductive sermon may need to be obvious only in the mind of the preacher as he/ she intentionally moves from the present experience of the hearers to general application. Inductive movement in a sermon is similar to movement found in a story, drama or conversation. There is organized flow but little formal structure. Craddock suggests that sermons can be strengthened if they are allowed to follow the speech-forms of the Bible. "Narrative texts would be shared in narrative sermons, parables in parabolic form, biography in biographical sermons, and similarly in other speech models."[37] Not all speech-forms found in the Bible, however, lend themselves well to preaching.

Story sermons fall naturally into inductive movement and style. While some story sermons, like those advocated by Jensen, consist of one long story, this is not always necessary for story preaching to

[35]Fred B. Craddock, Overhearing the Gospel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978) 66-69.

[36]Craddock, As One Without Authority, 145.   [37]Ibid., 153.

take place, according to Craddock.

> Communicating may be narrativelike and yet contain a rich variety
> of materials: poetry, polemic, anecdote, humor, exegetical analysis,
> commentary. To be narrativelike means to have the scope that ties
> it to the life of a larger community; it means the message has
> memory and hope; it means to be life-size in the sense of touching
> all the keys on the board rather than only intellectual or emotional
> or volitional; it means conveying the sense of movement from one
> place to another; it means having this movement on its own, as
> though the presence of the listeners were not essential to its
> process; it means thinking alongside the hearers.[38]

Story or narrative sermons may contain a wide variety of speech-forms

other than story, yet tell like a story and be heard like a story, if

they have inductive movement.

I find Craddock's arguments in behalf of the inductive method

convincing. This method, I believe, is not only more captivating for

hearers but is more in line with their normal thought processes and

gives them more opportunity for responsible decisions and actions.

Eugene L. Lowry and Story Sermons

Eugene L. Lowry, building upon the work done by Craddock and

others, published a book in 1980 under the title, The Homiletical Plot:

The Sermon as Narrative Art Form. "Plot! This is the key term for a

reshaped image of the sermon," he writes. "Preaching is storytelling.

A sermon is a narrative art form."[39] Lowry agrees with Craddock in

thinking that sermons can have narrativelike quality, enhancing their

movement and effectiveness, whether or not they involve a story or

parable.

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[38]Craddock, Overhearing, 137.

[39]Eugene L. Lowry, The Homiletical Plot (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980) 15.

Lowry focuses upon narrative plot and its application to sermon structure.

> In whatever type of narrative plot, the event of the story moves from a bind, a felt discrepancy, an itch born of ambiguity, and moves toward the solution, a release from the ambiguous mystery, the scratch that makes it right.[40]

Moving from a felt problem toward a solution is what sustains interest in a movie, novel or sermon.

Lowry proposes five stages for introducing plot into sermonic process. The first stage, "upsetting the equilibrium," introduces ambiguity, conflict or a felt problem which needs resolution. This is what Lowry calls an "itch" in search of a "scratch." The second stage, "analyzing the discrepancy," is the stage of diagnosing the problem which has been introduced. This stage raises the question, "why?", and prepares the hearers for a solution and for the gospel. The third stage, "disclosing the clue to resolution," involves the principle of reversal, turning expectations upside down. The fourth stage, "experiencing the gospel," introduces the grace of God as a solution consistent with the diagnosis. The gospel is affirmed. The fifth and final stage, "anticipating the consequences," introduces new possibilities for resolving the ambiguity in light of the gospel. Variations in the plot formation of sermons is possible, but the establishment of ambiguity is always necessary.[41]

Lowry concludes his book with a number of hints for good biblical narrative preaching:

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[40]Ibid., 23.

[41]Ibid., 28-73.

1) Attend to every 'insignificant' line.
2) Look between the lines.
3) Catch every encounter.
4) Bring data from your own experience.
5) Move behind behavior to motive.
6) Move behind facts to prior dynamics.
7) Utilize the senses.
8) Switch identification.
9) Utilize active grammar.
10) Break into first and second person singular form.
11) Move from the subjective to the objective, from particular to general - and back again.
12) Set the stage (foreshadowing).[42]

Lowry's suggestions for narrative preaching, I believe, come from sound skills of storytelling. He uses these proven skills for analyzing and determining what lies behind a Biblical text, as well as for retelling and delivering the story in narrative preaching.

Summary and Conclusions

A story sermon may take shape as "a story told," as suggested by Davis, Rice, Steimle and Jensen, or it may simply have "narrative-like" qualities allowing it to move inductively, as suggested by Craddock and Lowry. Whichever narrative shape is chosen for a particular sermon, a preacher is freed to draw upon imaginative powers and the shared experiences of a Christian community in constructing a message which is both graphic and engaging.

Unlike the traditional, deductive, sermon, an inductive sermon involves movement which engages hearers in a journey of heart and mind. One form of inductive preaching is to share with the hearers the inductive process followed in preparing the sermon. Real questions are asked of the text, possible solutions or interpretations are given,

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[42]Ibid., 89-94.

until finally the germinal idea or inspiration is discovered and
applied. The hearers, by being included in the sermon building process,
become fellow travelers in the quest for truth so that the discovery
and conclusion which the preacher would normally discover in private
becomes the common property of the hearers.

The germinal idea and impetus for story sermons will normally
grow out of a biblical narrative, parable or other text from scripture.
The educational background of a preacher, plus possible tours of Bible
lands, enriches the preacher's work in developing biblical story
sermons. A biblical narrative or parable may be retold in more or
less the original setting, or updated to modern times. Germinal ideas
for story sermons, however, need not be confined to a biblical source.
A secular story, such as a folk tale, a novel, a play, or a movie, may
also become the basis for a story sermon. A story may grow out of a
preacher's imagination and creative abilities, or from a real experi-
ence in the life of the preacher or congregation, and find Christian
relevance in the lesson it relates. A passage of scripture can be
read at the close of a secular or personal story, hinting at the
Christian truth intended.

There is much precedent to be found for story sermons in the
New Testament. Narrative passages fill the New Testament, from the
gospel stories to the speeches of Acts, from the narratives of Paul
to the visions of the book of Revelation. The story form comprised the
sermons of the early church.

> It is significant that the early Christian preaching was largely
> a story-telling mission, offering people a new story, the Christ-
> ian kerygma, to reorient their sense of meaning both of historical

time and of their own personal life-time."[43]

It also becomes significant that the church has chosen to unleash the power of the story form in the technological age of the twentieth century. The human mind continues to desire and respond to the story form.

The story form has added a new and exciting dimension to preaching in the past twenty-five years. Making use of dialogical style and inductive movement, story preaching is rapidly becoming accepted by homiletics teachers and preachers as an effective means for communicating the gospel. The effectiveness of story preaching lies, primarily, in its ability to capture and hold the attention of hearers. The story form stimulates the preacher toward more creative, imaginative preaching, which, in turn, stimulates the imaginative powers of the hearers. The story form helps the preacher and the hearers recognize, within the stories of every-day life, the working of God and the crossing points of the gospel with the experiences of life. An identification occurs between the hearers and the persons or situations portrayed in the story, thus helping the message of the sermon speak personally to the hearers. The story form contains much promise for the preacher and the hearers alike for the communication of eternal truths in a fresh, relevant and compelling manner.

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[43]Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," Journal of American Academy of Religion 39 (September 1971) 308.

CHAPTER 5

PREACHING PARABLES

Introduction

Much traditional preaching of the twentieth century has taken
the form of abstract language, patterned perhaps after the writing
style of the apostle Paul, which was abstract, propositional and theo-
logical. Even when Paul related his personal experiences or the
experiences of his companions in narrative form, he did so to relate
facts or illustrate a point (1 Cor. 11:23-29; 2 Cor. 12:1-10; Gal. 2).
Story preaching is attempting to recover the language style of Jesus,
which was narrative, anecdotal and poetic. Paul, I believe, drew
upon the left side of the brain while Jesus drew upon and appealed to
the right side of the brain. Paul used language to interpret and
explain phenomena, while Jesus used language which dealt more specif-
ically with persons and experience.

The parables of Jesus are an excellent example of right brain
language. His parables sprang directly from the lives of the people
with whom he spoke, dealing with such things as growing grain, tend-
ing sheep, attending a banquet or wayward children. They were
directed to a semi-tropical nation of herdsmen, peasants, farmers,
slaves and fishermen, living under the yoke of military rule. While
they are simple, realistic and believable stories, the parables of
Jesus point beyond themselves to such spiritual and transcendent
things as the Kingdom of God, the future age and the new life.

Traditional preaching of parables has often taken the approach of explaining them historically. Approaching the parable of the Good Samaritan in this way might find expression in a sermon as follows:

> Samaritans hated Jews. There was a long tradition behind it.
> Samaritans probably came into the Palestine scene after the
> Assyrian invasion. At that time . . . . If a Samaritan could
> love a Jew, we can certainly love the dispossessed, hurting
> people of earth.[1]

The historical approach to this parable might explain such things as the nature of the priests and Levites, the nature of ancient Jewish inns, or the topography of the Jericho road. Story preaching of the parables, on the other hand, attempts to recapture both the form and essence of the parables so that the parables are retold in narrative format. In the next sections of this chapter I will attempt to draw implications from recent discussions of parable theory and story preaching theory which can enhance the effectiveness of parable preaching.

Implications of Parable Theory

The parables of Jesus have characteristics which give them impact and make them memorable. These characteristics, transferable to preaching, are discovered in both the content and form of the parables. In earlier days, when parables were understood to be allegories or to have a single point, preaching concentrated on the content of the parables and ignored the form. In more recent times, under the influence of such writers as Amos Wilder, Dan Via, and John Crossan, parables are being viewed as metaphors of participation in

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[1]Robert D. Young, Be Brief About It (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) 72, 73.

Parable preaching can also evoke the participation of hearers by involving them in the experience of the gospel.

A second characteristic of the parables of Jesus is their open-ended nature, thus making them portable for the hearers. When a hearer or reader of a parable must supply the concluding application of the parable, he or she becomes involved in the parable and continues to ruminate on the message. The parables continue to speak to each generation because they are open-ended, requiring people to find meaning and identity within them. This characteristic is especially valuable when applied to parable preaching.

Reversal is another inherent characteristic of several parables of Jesus which can be carried into parable preaching. Through the use of reversal, Jesus shatters deep structures of the status quo, creating fresh insights. Jesus often "laid the rug" for his hearers before pulling it out from under them. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an example of reversal wherein the despised Samaritan becomes the good neighbor. Through drawing hearers into the story as participants, a parable like the Good Samaritan captures hearers so that they identify with one of the principal characters. Then, through reversal, the hearers suffer the fortunes or fates of the characters.[5] In order to be true to parable reversal in preaching, a preacher needs to re-establish the context of the parable to the extent of helping hearers grasp the shocking conclusion and make the application to themselves. When a preacher constructs a new parable for a sermon this, too, can

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[5]Robert W. Funk, "Structure in the Narrative Parables of Jesus," *Semeia* no. 2 (1974) 67.

incorporate the principle of reversal. A newly constructed parable can establish its own context in the telling of the parable.

The parables of Jesus, as has been noted, were rooted in the life-situation of Jesus and first interpreted in the Biblical context within the life-situation of the early Church. Jesus used the parables to call individuals to faith in relation to a specific life situation. "Everydayness is ingredient to the parable because everydayness constitutes the locus of man's destiny. If one is not Christian here, then where? If not now, when?"[6] When preaching the parables, a preacher would do well to incorporate the retelling of the parables into the life-situation of today's hearers.

Implications of Story Theory

The telling of parables and storytelling, in general, have much in common. This is understandable, of course, since parables are brief stories. Like parables, stories of all kinds seek to involve the participation of the hearers and, at times, are open-ended, use reversal, and are situated within the life-situation of the hearers. Participation and involvement of the hearers are primary aims of storytelling and story preaching. With the help of an open-ended style, reversal or the hearer's life-situation setting, the hearers become part of the story, applying its truth to themselves. A fictional story, like a parable, nearly always involve a complication for the principal characters. The story is centered around resolving the complication. If an impossible complication is finally resolved for

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[6]Fred Craddock, _As One Without Authority_ (Enid: Phillips University Press, 1974) 59.

a character in a happy ending, this is called a "comic curve."[7] If,
however, it appears that the complication is being happily resolved
and then the plot takes a sudden turn resulting in disaster for the
character, this is called a "tragic curve."[8] When hearers are caught
up in a character and his or her complication they begin to own the
story and participate vicariously, from a distance, in the action.
Craddock writes, "The two factors in the listener's experience, distance
(history) and participation (contemporaneity), are the two basic in-
gredients in the experience of overhearing."[9] It is possible, however,
for an individual to hear a story on the surface level without over-
hearing it in their own context and becoming involved in it. In story
preaching and parable preaching the aim is experiential, enabling
hearers to experience, firsthand, the judgment and grace of God.

Many of the story preaching principles of Craddock, Jensen and
Lowry are readily applicable to parable preaching. Parables, like
other stories, make use of dialogue rather than monologue. Parable
preaching thus lends itself to dialogical communication, with the
sermon developed in narrative form. Inductive movement, from particu-
lar to general, is natural movement for parables and parable preaching.
As Jensen suggests, a story can be created paralleling a particular
parable with the congregation making connections between the text and

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[7]Robert C. Meredith and John D. Fitzgerald, The Professional
Story Writer and His Art (New York: Crowell, 1963) 58.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Fred B. Craddock, Overhearing the Gospel (Nashville: Abingdon
Press, 1978) 118.

contemporary story. Story preaching and parable preaching are strongest when a single theme, rather than several themes, is followed in a particular sermon. Narrative parables, like other stories, contain a plot, beginning with ambiguity and moving toward solution. Parable preaching can especially use Lowry's five stages of sermonic process in the unfolding loop of homiletical plot, whether or not a particular parable contains a reversal. Parable preaching, like story preaching, can take the form of a story told or simply follow inductive movement and contain narrativelike qualities.

Parables contain simple, imaginative language - a quality enhancing the effect and power of the best stories and the best sermons. Parable preaching also benefits from the use of active images and imaginative language, while making use of word economy. Jesus used correlative thinking in his parables and other teachings. This is "thinking that looks for reciprocal relations between things, between persons, between little meanings and ultimate meanings."[10] Correlative thinking can also be used in parable preaching for involving the hearers and helping them make the jump from story to application.

The remainder of this paper focuses on an evaluation, using insights gained from this study on parables and stories, of four parable-based sermons.

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[10]Reuel L. Howe, The Miracle of Dialogue (New York: Seabury Press, 1963) 42.

CHAPTER 6

SERMON EVALUATION AND SUMMARY

Homiletics Class Observations

The homiletics class, Ventures in New Preaching Forms, taught
by K. Morgan Edwards at the School of Theology at Claremont in the
spring of 1983, provided me with a unique opportunity to write, preach,
hear and evaluate a wide variety of story and narrativelike sermons.
The books by Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry and Richard Jensen were used
as basic texts and sermons were written and preached following the
suggestions of these writers. Professor Edwards developed and used
evaluation forms based on the style of the inductive sermon (Craddock),
the homiletical plot sermon (Lowry) and the story sermon (Jensen).[1]

Inductive and homiletical plot sermons contain many character-
istics in common. Class members often had difficulty classifying their
sermons, for evaluative purposes, as either inductive or homiletical
plot sermons. Homiletical plot sermons, like inductive sermons,
nearly always begin with a particular human experience and conclude
with general application. Both forms have narrativelike movement, yet
contain a wide variety of materials in addition to stories. Both forms,
like the traditional one point sermons, also contain one central theme.
A notable difference between the two forms is that the inductive
sermon leaves the listeners free to conclude and apply the sermon while
the homiletical plot sermon provides a conclusion and calls listeners

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[1]Note Appendixes A, B and C.

to respond. Discerning listeners also note that homiletical plot sermons spend a considerable amount of time analyzing the plot discrepancy whereas inductive sermons do not contain this characteristic. A common complaint made by class members when listening to homiletical plot sermons was that they had a tendency to become bogged down in the sermon, losing interest. This appears to be one inherent weakness in the homiletical plot sermon form.

Story sermons, following the suggestions of Jensen, are easily distinguished from inductive and homiletical plot sermons. While story sermons have narrativelike movement, contain a plot and one central point, in these sermons the story becomes the preaching itself. As in inductive sermons, story sermons are open-ended leaving the story application to the hearers. Story sermons were among the most imaginative and captivating sermons preached in the homiletics class. Those individuals with obvious dramatic and storytelling skills had the least difficulty with this form. These story sermons were most effective when preached without notes. They were preached from behind the pulpit or away from the pulpit with equal effectiveness. While intrigued by these sermons, I often came away from class with the thought that I had heard a fine story but not a sermon. My preconceived ideas of sermons, accumulated from twenty-six years of preaching textual and expository sermons, made story sermons seem wrong and incomplete. This feeling, maybe, is shared by congregational members who have listened to expository sermons for many years. Story sermons, to become useable by older preachers and effective with established congregations, need to be introduced gradually and with patience.

Given time and practice on the part of the preacher, the story form can become widely accepted as one very effective sermon form.

The first sermon I preached in class, "It Isn't Fair . . . Is It?,"[2] based on the parable of the Vineyard Workers, was preached in the style of the homiletical plot form. The sermon begins with two true stories presenting the human predicament, analyzes the discrepancy these stories suggest, introduces reversal through the biblical text, then ends with the grace of God and a challenge for response. An invitation to accept Christ could naturally follow the sermon. The major weakness of this sermon, as revealed by class evaluations, was the reversal. While some class members saw the reversal through the handling of the text in the body of the sermon, most missed it altogether. The reversal of expectation is noted in the sermon, when referring to the text, but is not carried over in an abvious way for the two central characters in the sermon. Some class members also felt the sermon contained too much exhortation which was not essential for the central message, as in reference to vineyard symbolism in Israel and the levels of the heavenly Kingdom. Strengths seen in the sermon by class members included the opening stories, illustrative materials, the offer of good news and the conclusion.

The second sermon preached in class, "Found by God,"[3] based on the parable of the Lost Sheep, was primarily a "story told." This true story was told out of my experiences as a counselor of alcoholics and drug addicts. Class evaluations pointed out that this sermon was

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[2] Note Appendix D.
[3] Note Appendix E.

not perceived as being open-ended. Students would have preferred that
I concluded the sermon with the experiences and feelings of the central
character, Jim, and not added my feelings about Jim or the parable
application. I had experimented with preaching the sermon without any
textual application at the end, but felt the need to make this appli-
cation due to the power of the text and the research I had done on the
text. My sermon preconceptions did not allow me to be true to the
open-ended story form. I had hoped that the hearers would continue to
complete the story by thinking about the response and responsibility
of the Christian community toward the lost. A number of class members
pointed out that the sermon was meaningful for them with the ending
supplied, even though it did not fit the Jensen form.

The class helped me see that the Craddock, Lowry and Jensen
sermon forms are all viable and effective, making use of story move-
ment and style, for preaching in the twentieth century. I also
learned that it is valuable to stay with a given form in a particular
sermon. Adaptions, though workable, can weaken the total effect of a
carefully formulated sermon form.

Two Published Sermons

A published sermon, "The Absurd Goodness of God,"[4] by Robert
Young, is based on the parable of the Vineyard Workers and will be
evaluated here as an inductive sermon of the Craddock form. The
sermon has inductive movement in that it flows from particular situ-
ations to general truth. It, however, should not be classified as an

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[4]Note Appendix F.

inductive sermon in the purest sense. Rather than beginning with a present experience, as Craddock advocates, the sermon begins with a series of questions relating to the parable. The sermon, on the other hand, does not contain an obvious outline but moves smoothly through the present experiences of individuals to a general conclusion.

Young demonstrates a fine working knowledge of the text and recreates biblical insight for the hearers. He interprets the parable with partial focus on the workers and partial focus on the landlord or householder. He sees the workers representing those who are either unfairly treated in the labor world or those treated in generous fashion. He sees the householder as representing God, overflowing with absurd goodness and generosity.

Young's sermon catches attention with questions and preserves anticipation until the end. It is free from all references to "must," "should," and "ought." I was drawn into the sermon as I read it and left, to some extent, to make my own application. The sermon, however, is not open-ended as it is concluded by the statements, "The heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind. There is a crazy generosity there, and of this bounty we have all received."

The second sermon to be considered, "Bad Sam, the Lost Sheep,"[5] by Jensen, is based on the parable of the Lost Sheep. This sermon will be evaluated here by Jensen's own criteria for a story sermon. Growing out of a biblical story, this sermon is a fairy tale told from the vantage point of the lost sheep. It provides some background on sheep,

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[5]Note Appendix G.

though somewhat faulty (sheep definitely are not smart creatures), and leads to eucatastrophe when "Bad Sam" is found. The story is the sermon and is left open-ended with no application or conclusion. It acts as a metaphor of participation, drawing out the involvement of the hearers. It does not function as an allegory. The finding of the lost sheep is the central point of the sermon and it ends in joy.

While "Bad Sam, the Lost Sheep" fulfills many of the criteria for a story sermon, it leaves much to be desired. In my opinion, the sermon might be effective for children under eight years of age but would be an insult to the intelligence of most adults. It is too simplistic to capture and hold the interest of adult worshipers. In my opinion, it does not disclose the reality of God/Jesus Christ, it does not stir emotions, it does not elicit capability nor heighten consciousness. While the sermon is open-ended, it leads nowhere.

General Observations

The four sermons found in the appendixes, and evaluated above, are certainly not perfect examples of parable preaching based on story theory and method, but they are attempts to put into practice the principles involved. While the parables lend themselves particularly well to story preaching, it should not be forgotten that many other Biblical narratives and Biblical characters provide similar stimulus for such preaching.

Story and narrativelike sermons are not the total answer for effectively communicating the gospel through preaching, but these innovative forms do provide variety and freshness to preaching. While there will likely always be need for expository, proclamatory, intel-

lectual, left-brain preaching, presented in monological style, story preaching offers a little dessert to the more stable, and sometimes boring, fare.

The values and magnetic attraction found in storytelling the world over are also to be found in story preaching. People respond with attentive ears to good story sermons, and with attention there naturally follows enthusiasm and learning. When imaginations are stimulated through story sermons, new insights and new courses of action become possible.

One of the most positive values of story sermons is their ability to draw listeners into the story; to visualize scenes, to identify with characters, and to become involved in conflict, crisis and resolution. The listeners become participants within the sermon and not merely consumers. Preachers have an abundance of universal human feelings and experiences to draw upon in helping listeners identify with story events and characters. Through identification, listeners experience first-hand the dilemmas, decisions, fears, doubts and faith of others. Conflict and dialogue between the world within story and the world outside story are established. Listeners view the world through the eyes of others and inwardly appropriate faithful response to specific circumstances which might arise.

Because of strong listener participation in story sermons, it is not wise for the preacher to say very much after the actual story is finished. This feature of story sermons, as I have discovered, is difficult for a preacher to learn. There is a strong tendency to explain the story to the listeners. If the preacher wants to explain

the story this can be done in four ways: the tip-off, the aside, the hint, and the wrap-up. The tip-off is an explanation that can be given in the introduction before the story begins. The aside places the story action on hold as the listeners are told what the action has to do with their lives. The hint is given as a part of the story, but does not necessarily belong to it. And, the wrap-up is given at the close of the story, interpreting the story to the listeners.[6] The wrap-up is the type of explanation I used in the sermon, "Found By God." This method is commonly used but does detract from the open-ended nature of a story.

The open-ended nature of story sermons appears to have both negative and positive aspects. People who go to church to hear a sermon which provides answers for questions and concerns of life are disappointed with a draw-your-own-conclusion sermon. They go away from church more puzzled about spiritual matters and their faith response than when they came. Yet, at the same time, when people are given final answers in a sermon they will either accept the answers without any thought on their part or reject the answers as simplistic and nonapplicable. An open-ended sermon places responsibility with the listeners, which may or may not prove wise. The thrust of a story sermon should lead listeners to an implied conclusion, however some listeners may miss the point altogether and draw faulty conclusions. In handling some of the grey areas of Christian thinking and living, where the preacher has no final answers to give, the open-ended sermon

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[6]David Upp, "Story as a Medium of Preaching" (Unpublished D. Min. project, Southern Methodist University, 1981) 77-79.

seems most appropriate. In other areas of Christian life where there may already be too much confused thinking, or where there are essentials of faith or doctrine which need to be conveyed, it seems expedient for the preacher to be straight forward with the truth and application intended. As there is a place for both non-direct and direct counseling, there is also a place for both non-direct and direct preaching.

Story preaching, as a mode of communication, yields nothing to more traditional preaching in its use of or faithfulness to scripture. While not every Biblical passage lends itself to story preaching, many do. Each Biblical passage has its own form of expression and narrative forms especially, such as the parables, lend themselves admirably to story preaching. Ancient Biblical stories can come alive in the minds of listeners through story preaching, as the preacher tells how things were in a way that enables listeners to understand how it is now. When Biblical stories are lengthened or retold in contemporary language, it is common for listeners to doubt whether the preacher has been true to the text. While this fact may be seen as a liability of story preaching on Biblical texts, it needs to be weighed with the assets gained from tailoring Biblical stories to current situations and from helping the truths of the Bible speak more directly to people today.

Summary

In summary, I have focused this paper on storytelling, the parables of Jesus, story preaching and parable preaching in an attempt to discover helpful insights to strengthen contemporary preaching. It was noted that storytelling is one of the most ancient and powerful modes of human communication, appealing to both educated and non-

educated people. Story theory, construction and delivery were considered in an attempt to discover the genius behind story form. The parables of Jesus, as one type of story, were examined for their structure and ability to convey the deepest truths of God. Two parables, the Lost Sheep and the Vineyard Workers, were given closer scrutiny and then used as texts for parable preaching. I preached two sermons in a homiletics class on these texts and two printed sermons were noted to present alternative approaches to the texts.

In retrospect, I believe parables can be preached true to their parabolic form. However, I had difficulty producing sermons on the chosen texts as metaphors and language events. Both are handled with the traditional, allegorical, form. God is seen as the good shepherd and the generous householder. While Jesus did not use the parables as allegories and moral stories, I seem to have an irrestible tendency to use them this way in preaching to the Church. With time and practice I hope to develop skills, as demonstrated in Jensen's sermon, for preaching on the parables true to their form.

In conclusion, storytelling in preaching, whether the sermon is story or makes use of narrativelike structure, is one valuable tool to be grasped by the modern preacher. Storytelling should not be seen as the only way for communicating the gospel to modern ears, but as one effective way which should not be overlooked. Storytelling in preaching is one way of integrating His story with all the human stories of preacher and listeners in an attempt to make sense out of life and find meaning through the gospel.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

THE INDUCTIVE SERMON
(Craddock)

OPENING	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Opening Preserve anticipation?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Open with present experience?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

BIBLICAL

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Did preacher listen to the text?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was Biblical insight recreated?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was there good news?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was God's Word from scripture or life opened before you?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

MOVEMENT

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Was preacher part of rather than above listeners?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was structure subordinate to movement?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Did sermon move from particular to general?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Did movement sustain interest Preserve anticipation?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was sermon free of "must" "should" and "ought"?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Were transition points clear?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Were images specific and concrete?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Did images recreate way life is?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was there singleness of theme?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Were all ideas subordinate to and supportive of the central idea?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Did you sense an "aha" experience?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was sermon inductive?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Were you drawn into the sermon?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

CONCLUSION

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Were you left to conclude the sermon?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Left to own conclusions and enabled to make own decisions?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Appendix B

HOMILETICAL PLOT SERMON
(Lowry)

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Did the sermon begin with the itch?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Human predicament?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
1. "Oops" Upset the equilibrium?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Engage you in sermon?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Establish ambiguity?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
2. "Ugh" Analyze the discrepancy?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Ask 'why' the discrepancy?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Lead through analysis of the discrepancy?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Move toward release from ambiguity?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Move toward the "scratch"?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was there a central plot?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
3. "Aha" Disclose clue to resolution?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Principle of reversal?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Are things now turned upside down?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
4. "Whee" Experience the gospel?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Avoid Exhortation?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Prompt self-disclosure?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was good news of forgiveness offered?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Move you to self-acceptance?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Help you get beneath superficial confession?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
5. "Yeah" Aware of new possibilities?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Aware of God's love for you?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Hopeful future expectations?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Avoid works righteousness?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was there call to response following awareness of acceptance?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Appendix C

THE STORY SERMON
(Jensen)

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
OPENING					
Did the sermon grow out of a biblical story?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
BIBLICAL					
Did you appropriate faith inwardly?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was the reality of Jesus Christ disclosed?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was there eucatastrophe?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
DEVELOPMENT					
Was the story the preaching?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Metaphors of participation?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Did story make one central point?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Did narrative point beyond itself?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Were you moved to "laugh" "cry" "hope" or "wonder"?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Did sermon elicit capability without giving information?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was consciousness heightened?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Did sermon evoke rather than explain?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Were you caught by surprise?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
CONCLUSION					
Did sermon end in joy?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Were you able to say "That's my story"?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Was story open-ended?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Will you complete and apply the story?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Sermon evaluation forms in Appendixes A, B and C are reproduced from forms produced and used by Professor K. Morgan Edwards for his class, Ventures in New Preaching Forms (AM 423), taught at the School of Theology at Claremont in the spring of 1983. Class forms also had room for the name of the preacher and evaluator, the date, and notations on strengths and weaknesses of the sermon.

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Appendix D

IT ISN'T FAIR . . . IS IT?

A Sermon By
Les Peterson

Text: Matthew 20:1-16

Her name was Mary. She grew up around the turn of the 20th century on the high plains of Western Kansas. . . the eldest of seven children. Her father, a farmer, managed a meager living for the family on a dry-land farm. As far back as Mary could remember the family attended a small, open-country, church. Her father and a sister died of influenza when the dread disease swept over the high plains. She was a recent high school graduate at the time and immediately went to work to support the family. She secured a teaching certificate and began teaching in a sod school house. Teaching remained her vocation for the next forty years.

After her brothers and sisters were grown and gone from home, Mary took her mother into her own home, providing care and support. Her mother lived a long, full life, and as a result, Mary never married. In a sense she was married to Christ, for she loved him and devoted countless hours to his service. Using her teaching skills she taught and directed Sunday Schools for over fifty years. She was a deaconess, an active member of women's organizations, and always seemed first to arrive with a helping hand when someone was hurting. She outlived her family and spent the last years of her life in a nursing home, writing poetry for her friends and church family. She

died poor, but happy, at the age of 91. In brief, Mary was a saintly woman who made life richer for everyone around her.

His name was Bill. He, too, called Kansas his home. Bill was baptized as an infant and raised in a Christian home. As a teenager, however, he decided the Church was not for him - much to the anguish of his parents. After high school he joined the army and fought in World War I. While in the military he adopted a rough lifestyle and crude language - characteristics which never left him. Following the war he went to college and earned a degree in osteopathic medicine. This field of medicine was unorthodox in those days and Bill fought all the way through the state legislature to achieve official accept- ance for the practice. During World War II he established what he claimed was the first blood bank in the nation, providing plasma for wounded service men. When this war ended Bill settled down in a small town as a family doctor, where he remained the rest of his life. With his wife and two children he lived in a large and lavish house.

Throughout his adult life Bill remained alienated from the church. At times he was even hostile toward it, calling Christians "hypocrites," among other choice titles. I became acquainted with Bill when he was 75 and still practicing medicine. We became friends due to a common love for hunting. Four years later he contracted lung cancer and slowly began to die. He suddenly became concerned about the status of his soul, and shortly before he died sought the forgiveness of the Lord for his erring ways. I watched as he died with a sense of contentment, gradually turning down his oxygen as he gave me instruction.

Now, what kind of eternal reward do you suppose God was willing to grant these individuals? We are not in a position to judge and we are on shaky ground when trying to second-guess the judgments of God, but because of her sacrificial and saintly life, we might assume Mary was looked upon with favor by God at the time of her death and given an eternal reward. We generally conceive of this reward as a heavenly home where we can enjoy continuing, eternal, fellowship with God. But, what about Bill? While he did good in his life as a doctor, he certainly did not do it in the name of the Lord. It was done only in his own name. Yet, at the end of life he sought forgiveness and placed faith in Christ. Should he receive the same eternal reward as Mary?

Our human sense of justice and fairness tells us that God should reward these individuals differently in the eternal Kingdom. The disciples of Jesus seemed to believe this. They fought over who would occupy the seats of honor in the Kingdom of heaven. Those who believe in works righteousness would also give the greater prize to Mary. They might say "her Christian deeds followed her, providing stars in her crown." There are other people who believe the heavenly Kingdom consists of seven levels, thus incorporating a wide variety of Christian people. The real saints, they say, become little gods and even share in God's rule. Those less saintly or less diligent in this life end up on lower levels of heaven. Each of these beliefs help satisfy some sense of fairness, but they are not the teaching of Jesus.

In his parable of the Vineyard Workers Jesus upsets our sense of fairness. He tells of a householder who needed workers to care for a vineyard. He hired some workers at the beginning of the day for the

fair wage of one denarius. At the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour and the eleventh hour of the day he went out into the market place and hired more workers. At the end of the day, the twelfth hour, the householder paid his laborers. And, he paid one denarius to all his workers, regardless of whether they labored twelve hours or one. Those who worked twelve hours, of course, were unhappy. This was _not_ fair treatment. Even though they agreed to accept one denarius for their labor, they _thought_ they should receive more in light of the circumstances. There was a reversal of expectation.

Throughout the Bible the vineyard stands for God's chosen people. For Jews, the vineyard is Israel; for Christians, it is the Kingdom of heaven or the Church. The householder in this parable may be seen to represent God. The parable, then, deals with God's treatment of his workers in his Kingdom and that which they receive for service. It is not talking about a guaranteed daily or annual wage, where individuals receive the same wage regardless of hours worked.

The Jewish rabbis have a parable, found in the Talmud, which tells of a hard working laborer who the king removes from a vineyard after only two hours' work, paying a full days wages. To the other workers, who grumble, the king justifies his action by saying, "I have not wronged you; this labourer has done more in two hours than you have done in the whole day."[1] The rabbis, writing in the 3rd century A.D., took the focus off the underemployed workers who finally have a

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[1] Joachim Jeremias, _The Parables of Jesus_ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972) 138.

chance to work and placed it on the hard working man who receives a bonus. The rabbis emphasized merit, but Jesus emphasized grace.

It is the good news that God has welcomed to the Kingdom the lost - the underemployed, the outsiders, the poor, the neglected - all who previously had no chance. God is generous with mercy and grace. In the parable, however, we find that those who worked all day in the vineyard resent the generosity of the householder toward those who worked only one hour. We easily identify with these grumbling workers. We are outraged by displays of favoritism in a classroom, on a job, or in the Social Security system. We are quick to note when others seem to receive blessings which do not come to us. We begrudge the generosity of God's grace . . . when shown to others. It isn't fair . . . is it?

Is it possible to observe the blessings which come to others from God, and give thanks for them?

The great Russian writer Dostoyevsky tells the story of a woman who found herself in hell and felt she did not belong there. She could not bear the suffering and cried out in agony for the mercy of God. God listened and was moved with pity. "If you can remember one good deed that you did in your lifetime, I will help you," said God. Wracking her brain, she remembered that once she had given a starving neighbor an onion. God produced the onion complete with stem. The woman grabbed the onion, and God began to pull her up and out of hell. But others, damned with her, began to grab hold of the woman's skirts to be lifted out, too. The stem of the onion held and would have saved them all, but the woman began to kick and scream for them

to let go. Thrashing about trying to dislodge her friends was too much for the onion and the stem snapped, plunging them all back into hell.[2]

It can happen this way with us, too. Holding to our onion stems - the grace God has given to us - we lash out jealously at those who have not done as much as we have for God. It is the irony of self-righteousness that the very good works we think will get us into heaven can drop us back into hell.

God has chosen to deal with people on the basis of grace and generosity. The parable of the Vineyard Workers appears to defend God's freedom to extend grace to whomever God chooses. There is room in the Kingdom for us all, regardless of how old or young we are in the faith. Dan Via summarizes this parable by saying, "Our very existence depends on whether we will accept God's gracious dealings, his dealings which shatter our calculations about how things ought to be ordered in the world."[3]

When the judgment comes, and it will come for us all, we will find that the last in the Kingdom will be treated like the first. "The last will be first, and the first last." This statement at the end of the parable does not mean the last vineyard workers will be treated better than the first, but that all will be treated equally. In a Jewish apocalypse of the first century A.D., IV Ezra, a seer wants to know if previous generations will be at a disadvantage when compared

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[2] Richard Carl Hoefler, The Divine Trap (Lima: C.S.S., 1980) 80.

[3] Dan Otto Via, Jr., The Parables (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) 154.

with those who survive until the judgment of the world. God answers, "I will make the judgment like a circle dance; the last there are not behind nor are the first in front." (IV Ezra 5:42)[4] The first can not be distinguished from the last, nor the last from the first. We are all on equal footing before God, through faith. Yes, even Mary and Bill!

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[4] Jeremias, 36.

Appendix E

FOUND BY GOD

A Sermon By
Les Peterson

Text: Luke 15:4-6

It was a voice as distinct as any he had ever heard, yet he was all alone. He was traveling at 55 miles an hour in Orange County, making a delivery in his company truck. The radio was not playing and the windows were closed, yet he heard a voice. The voice spoke his name, "Jim." The hair stood on the back of his neck. "What . . . do you want?" "You are destroying your life. Seek help, or die!"

Jim pulled the truck to the side of the highway, stopped the engine, and buried his head in his large hands. What did this mean? What was he to do? Again he heard the voice! It told him to go to a certain hospital for treatment. He had never heard of the hospital or the treatment offered. Yet he was convinced he had heard the voice of GOD, and better obey.

He returned to the company office, told his boss he was not well and had to go home. When he got home, he realized his wife was still at work. With no time to waste, he wrote a note for his wife, grabbed a change of clothes and struck out for the hospital. Upon arrival at the hospital, he could not gather courage to go in. "Luckily," he thought to himself, "there is cocaine in the glove box. That will give me courage." During the next four hours, as darkness gathered, he sat in his car snorting coke, thinking about the voice.

Then, scenes from his life began taking shape in his mind. He had grown to maturity in the deep South during the turbulent days of the '60's. His parents, both alcoholics, had physically abused and deserted him by the time he was five. His mother's parents took him in and raised him. His grandfather owned a "still" and taught him to drink home brew. His grandmother, a staunch Baptist, took him to Church every Sunday. At first he resisted, but eventually began to enjoy Church. He recalled the day he accepted Christ, visualizing the joy and pride on his grandmother's face. His grandmother was the only positive influence in his early life. From her he learned about love and honesty. Upon graduation from High School he sought employment in California. Shortly after arriving in Los Angeles he found his truck driving job - then met and married his lovely wife.

One day a "friend" offered him some cocaine. "It will stimulate you and make you more at ease around people," he was told. "Well, it shouldn't hurt to try," Jim thought. The coke really did make him feel good. It even helped him drink more alcohol without becoming drunk. He began to use it regularly. Soon his body and mind craved it. Then he discovered it took everything he earned to pay for the coke. One day he stole and sold a truckload of company supplies to support his habit. His grandmother had taught him not to steal. His conscience haunted him, but he stole anyway. He simply could not live without coke.

Then he discovered he could buy large quantities of coke, sell enough to other people to pay for the shipment, and keep plenty for himself. As a dealer he hosted coke parties for anyone who would come.

Sometimes the parties lasted all night. In addition to snorting, Jim began injecting and "free basing" cocaine for a more powerful "rush" effect. He found it harder and harder to stay alert on his job. Often he had black-out's on the highway, not remembering how he got from one location to another. He had to pull off the highway at frequent intervals to sniff coke into his body.

That very afternoon, shortly before hearing the voice, he had stopped at a roadside park for a quick fix. "Perhaps the coke had something to do with the voice," he thought. "Yet the voice was so real . . . so convincing." "Is it possible," he wondered, "that God chose to speak to him while he was under the influence . . .?" Whatever the cause, he knew what had happened and he felt in no position to question the ways of God.

He entered the emergency room at the hospital, was examined by a doctor, and immediately sent to the detox unit for alcohol and drug withdrawal. The next week was one long nightmare for Jim as the toxic effects of alcohol and coke worked their way out of his body. One night a huge black panther stood at the foot of his bed and then jumped on the bed, standing astride his body, looking full into his face. As hard as he tried, he could not scream for help or move his body. Finally Jim surrendered himself to the Panther and the beast disappeared. The rest of the night he slept in a hall bed beside the nurses' station.

For the next month Jim stayed in the hospital relearning, or perhaps learning for the first time, the joys of a life free from the ever-tightening chains of drugs. He found himself in a caring and

accepting atmosphere . . . and began to heal physically, mentally and spiritually. He believed, to the depth of his being, that he had been found and saved by God.

When Jim first told me his story about hearing the voice of God, I smiled inwardly to myself, careful not to let him think I doubted his statement. "He is only spaced out on coke," I thought. Besides, God has never spoken to me that way. God does not intervene in our daily lives in such ways . . . right? We are free to live our lives as we wish. True, God did intervene with his Son, shaking up human history with a cross and an empty tomb. But that was a one-time intervention. True, some ancients like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Moses and John, claimed to hear the voice of God - but that was a long time ago! Surely such things could not happen in the twentieth century - not in this enlightened age? Too much divine intervention destroys human initiative and makes of us puppets rather than persons.

Yet, here was a man, belonging fully to the twentieth century, lost literally and spiritually from God . . , who claimed to have heard the voice of God. And, more surprisingly, he acted upon what he heard. Could I, a cleric, be doubting the ways of God?

Then I remembered a parable Jesus told to some other skeptical clerics, called Scribes and Pharisees. A certain shepherd, having a hundred sheep, discovers one has wandered off and become lost. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine in the wilderness, supposedly in the care of another shepherd, and searches until he finds the lost one. Then he carries the sheep home on his shoulders, rejoicing. Upon arriving home, he invites neighbors and friends to rejoice with him.

We are not certain who Jesus had in mind for the shepherd role in this parable, if anyone. Tradition has linked the shepherd with Jesus himself, or with God. I prefer to think of the shepherd as God. The parable concludes, "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance."

Jesus, through the parable application, spells out a radical new definition of repentance. He directly identifies repentance with being found. If, in fact, God is shepherd in the parable, then repentance is being found by God. The bumper sticker slogan which reads, "I found it," might more properly read, "Found by God!" In the parable, God assumes the burden of restoration, carrying the lost one home . . . an image reminiscent of a cross. Then, filled with uncontainable joy, God reunites the lost one with the flock.

Appendix F

THE ABSURD GOODNESS OF GOD

A Sermon By
Robert D. Young

Text: Matthew 20:1-16

The story of the laborers in the vineyard has enough absurd-
ities built in that it could be a slice of life seen by those who feel
life is ultimately unfair. Or, is it the reverse? Is it another
slice of life? The slice seen by those who know they've gotten far
more than they deserve? Which is it, this story? Is the God pictured
here absurdly good? or just absurd?

Certainly there's absurdity in the story. The more it's made
to teach about economics or labor practice, the more absurd it appears.
Any business person who tried to put this teaching into practice
wouldn't last a year.

It's late summer, rains are coming, grapes need harvesting.
The workday begins at 6 A.M. The owner goes to the labor hall, says
to a group, "Looking for work?" and they answer yes. "Fine!"
"There's the vineyard. Go pick grapes." "And, let's agree to one
denarius a day." (A denarius, by the way, was the average pay for a
day's work.) They go and work. The owner goes out again, and again,
at nine o'clock, noon, three o'clock, five. At these times, no con-
tract is made. The men are there who need work, and want work. The
owner simply says, "Go out, work, and rest assured, I'll do what is
right by you."

Six o'clock, the whistle blows. The owner comes and, follow-

ing Jewish custom, pays each man for the day. The late afternoon group - a full day's pay, one denarius. The three-hour workers - a full day's pay, one denarius. The six-hour group - the same. Finally, the last group came - those under contract. They had worked twelve hard hours, sunup to sundown, doing strenuous, backbreaking work. And what did they receive? On denarius - a full day's pay.

Naturally, they were ticked off. "What's this? Our work valued the same as the Johnny-come-latelies?" "Unfair!" "Unfair!" "Where's George Meany? Cesar Chavez?" "Start the boycott! Throw up the picket lines!"

Then, the landlord speaks. "Have I really been unfair?" "Didn't we have a contract?" "Didn't I keep my bargain?" "And, furthermore, can't I be generous?" "If I'm quite fair to you, can't I be quite generous to others?"

"Well, yes . . ." (There is some mumbling as the workers sort this out.) "Yes," they concede, "we suppose so, but frankly, what a way to run a railroad!"

That's the story as Jesus told it. It's certainly a strange one. If this is a lesson in labor relations, my sympathies are with the all-day workers. If this landlord were operating in the San Joaquin Valley, a boycott and a good strong union would be called for.

There's too much unfairness in the work world now. For consider: I work hard, do my best, give an honest day's work for a day's pay. And, from my observation, there are a lot of inequities. Mazie is always taking sick days off whether she needs them or not; Muriel goofs off at the water fountain or coffee machine; Mac is the world's

best delegator: He simply passes the work on. Come payday - they all get the same as I do, if not more. And, have you noticed those right out of college? Their salary starts where mine ended after years of experience. These Johnny-come-lately whiz kids! Life should be fair. But it isn't. I'd like to believe that if you do right from 6 A.M. until 6 P.M. you'll make out better than those late afternoon types that put in an hour just before the whistle blows. But it doesn't happen.

Don Wilson, a brilliant, compassionate pastor, head of a large church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, forced to resign. Hit with cancer. A certain woman, now divorced: She tried to do right. Did she deserve to be left with the kids, while he took up with another woman? A middle-aged child living near senile parents, directly responsible for their well-being. The other children are states away, in Southern California. How convenient for them!

And consider those rascals who never have trouble. They have no great faith, no great goodness. Why is their paycheck the same as mine? Unfair!

If you are identifying with the 6 A.M. workers, as I tend to do, that is your slice of life. Life has inequities, life is unfair!

But, suppose the story is not about economics at all. Suppose we are not the 6 A.M. workers, but more like those called in for the last hour? Suppose we are dealing with a landlord of strict justice, but one of absurd generosity? Just suppose we're in the hands of a taskmaster who, admittedly in a crazy way, gives far more than any deserve, and that we are among the undeserving, and not among those

who are "earning" their way? Then, the story is completely different. Then God - for that is who the landlord represents - is of a nature to be more good than fair. And this is what the story seems to teach.

While the 6 A.M. workers use their calculators to see if they got all that's coming, we who have more savvy to the ways of God, and who should know the real score, should go home with a full day's pay, humming "Amazing Grace." Honestly now, if we really size up how we've fared, haven't we gotten more than we deserve? Absurdly so?

Two retired men came to joyful and useful faith in my last church. One was president of the Trustees; the other an Elder. The Elder was also a "man Friday" in the office. Both came to faith past fifty-five, and had a great time in the church. Was their experience a recompense for fifty-five years of devotion? Or was it the touch of the landowner? The absurd goodness of God?

Eric Hoffer, early in his working life, picked up a used copy of Montaigne's essays, became fascinated by a well-constructed sentence, was led on to a goal: Be a writer. Did this happen by chance? by serendipity? Or was it another mark of an absurdly good landlord?

And what more could be said: about the time Murphy's Law did not operate, when grace worked in our homes, despite the fact we didn't follow Spock or Gesell, and when we didn't reap the consequences of our misadventures.

As a psalmist phrased it, "If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee . . ." absurd mercy, that follows us all the days of our life: Late afternoon people who get paid absurdly well.

So, let the calculating types continue to work under contract, and find ways that life is unfair. They can make their case quite well. But frankly,

"High heaven hates the lore
Of nicely calculated less or more."

God's essence is not strict fairness. The heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind. There is a crazy generosity there, and of this bounty we have all received.[1]

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[1] Robert D. Young, Be Brief About It (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) 129-134.

Appendix G

BAD SAM, THE LOST SHEEP

A Sermon By
Richard A. Jensen

Text: Luke 15:3-7

This morning, dear people, we have a rare treat in store for us. We have a guest preacher. It's a little unusual, I admit, but we have a sheep to preach today's sermon. I want to assure you that he comes to us with impeccable credentials. Nothing but the best for First Christian Church. With no further ado, then, let me introduce to you Sam Sheep.

(Pastor makes a gesture of introduction, steps into Sam Sheep's place and continues. . . .)

Thank you Pastor Jensen for that introduction. I am Sam Sheep and I can't tell you how glad I am to have this chance to speak to you this morning. I've always felt that the Bible was a bit unfair to sheep. I trust that you all remember the story of Baalam and his ass from the Old Testament. Baalam's ass spoke to him. Asses speak in the Bible, but there is not one word from a sheep even though we fill up far more of the Bible's pages than they do. It's unfair, I say. But, today at least, I get a chance to change all that.

Now let me see. Where to begin? I suppose we might just as well begin at the beginning. We'll do it. We'll begin with my birth. I must confess to you that there was nothing out of the ordinary about it. Mind you though, I was probably a lot more carefully bred than most of you. You know, we sheep go back a long way in history.

In fact, we go back to the very beginnings of the human race. Maybe even before that. I don't know. At any rate, ever since there were people we sheep have been around to assure them the best of wool and, what is considerably less appetizing to me, the best of food.

Now I would like to put in a good word for my brothers and sisters. Our contribution to humankind's happiness should not be overlooked. Our wool has given warmth to peasants and kings for centuries on end. Just think of the important people in history who have shouldered what was shorn from us each springtime! Think of all the shepherds who have tended us. There's some pretty important people there - Abraham, Isaac, and David, just to name a few. And poets love us! Get out any anthology of poetry or ask any teacher of literature. They'll tell you how many poems extol the virtue and simplicity of life in our pastures. Pastoral life they call it. Such a life has become the model of life, the very ideal, for many great minds. And, of course, you remember that the song of the angel's announcing the birth of Jesus was sung in our midst. I don't suppose it ever occurs to you to think that there were more sheep in attendance at that celestial concert than there were shepherds. It's not certain how many of my flockmates made it into the stable. You can bet they were there though, and before those Wise Men ever showed up.

But enough generalizing about sheep. It's time, I suppose, to get down to my story. The first thing you should know about me is that in spite of all the glowing reports I've given you about sheep, I have never liked being one. How would you like to be shorn naked each spring? How would you like it being a good little sheep in the

flock obeying all of the shepherd's commands when you know full well
that the climax of your life is going to be a quick trip to the market
so that you can be slaughtered? Are you starting to get my point?
Frankly I've never understood why you Christians think it's so great
to call Jesus the Good Shepherd. I don't care how "good" he is. If
you are somehow his "sheep" then that means that at some point you've
got to give up your life for his sake. That's how it is with a shepherd
and his sheep.

How angry that shepherd would get with me! I don't know how
many days he had to leave the rest of the flock and look and look and
look for me. Boy that was fun. If you were smart enough, and contrary
to our bad press we sheep are pretty smart creatures, you could always
avoid the shepherd's searching eyes. I should know. I was the best
in the business. He never found me unless I wanted to be found. I
always wandered just far enough away that I couldn't be found. If
danger arose from other animals, all I had to do was listen very
carefully for my shepherd's voice. A smart sheep always knows his

shepherd's voice. We can hear it over long distances. So, when

danger lurked, I listened very carefully until I heard his voice.

Hearing it, I hurried back to the fold as fast as my little legs

would take me. The shepherd would be so mad when I would come back.

But what could he do?

"Bad Sam" they called me. I don't suppose I have to tell you

that I was mighty proud of that nickname. "Bad Sam." I had a reputa-

tion. I had something to live up to. It's easy just to go along with

the flock. But to stand out, was something. And I was bad. I was an

outcast in many ways, but that was the path I had chosen for myself.

Now, to get to the point of my story. One day I was up to my

old tricks. I strayed even further than usual from the shepherd and

his nice little sheep. As time went on, you see, I got braver and

braver. The badder you get the braver you get. Only this time I went

too far. Darkness fell. The sounds of hostile and strange animals

howled in my ears. I was scared, I tell you, scared to death. So

I did what I always did. I listened. Ever so still, I listened for

my shepherd's voice. But try as I might I just couldn't hear it.

This time I really had gone too far. As a matter of fact, I was lost.

I was lost, I was frightened and I was all alone. I wondered what my

shepherd would do about me? "Will he search and search until he finds

me out here?" I was a crushing liability. The shepherd might search

out the good sheep. Surely he would. But he wouldn't search for me.

Not for me. Not for "Bad Sam."

Minutes turned to hours. The strange sounds of the other

creatures were closing in on me. I trembled. "This is the end," I

figured. Then I thought I heard a familiar voice off in the distance.

I thought I heard my shepherd's voice. He called. I listened. He

called again. Again I listened. He called a third time. It was my

shepherd. This time I answered with my loudest baaaaaaa. It wasn't

long before "Bad Sam" the lost sheep was "Bad Sam" the found sheep.

Now I must confess to you, though I know it will sound pre-

sumptuous, that I've always wondered if Jesus knew about me when he

told that parable:

> What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of
> them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go
> after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has
> found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he
> comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors,
> saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which
> was lost." Even so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven
> over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous
> persons who need no repentance.   Luke 15:3-7[1]

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[1]Richard A. Jensen, Telling the Story (Minneapolis: Augsburg,
1980) 170-174.

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